# RECONSTRUCTED ROMAN RITE

by

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**Reconstructed Manual of Public and Private Ritual Practice, in which elements drawn from other similar cultures (for reasons of continuity, preservation, and universal archaisms) serve to fill the gaps that the available sources are unable or unwilling to bridge. There exist numerous affinities and compatibilities with rites of analogous polytheistic and animistic religions, whose integration into the Roman cult does not undermine the backbone grounded in documented sources and archaeological evidence; what is adopted constitutes an enrichment intended to complete what already exists, without in any way undermining the Etruscan-Roman tradition or altering its deepest essence.**

## Introduction

For a long time, the search for a pure and universal spirituality led me far from the Roman Cult; I needed more, something that would truly put me in touch with a vaster world, one not limited to a circumscribed geographic or historical region, however grand. The idea of an "identity-based religion" founded on a specific ethnic/national group (which is, in essence, the core concept of neopaganism) no longer met my needs. I had evolved, both spiritually and as a human being. I began to look around me; I expected nothing, yet it was precisely in this wandering that I noticed details I had previously ignored, because I was too focused on Rome: I saw that certain cultures share far more than one might think—souls separated at birth. Thus I began to piece things together, to dig deeper and deeper, until I uncovered the roots, and it was those very roots that brought me back to Rome, but from a different perspective. I realized that the Etruscans had much to tell, both about the origins of Roman spirituality and about their contacts with the lost native populations of the Mediterranean, of which the Etruscans were the last surviving witness. I am speaking of a primitive substratum that

connected one shore of this sea to the other, influencing the civilizations that flourished later, with recognizable mythological and ritual elements. The Etruscans then transmitted this heritage to Rome, which we can see more clearly in its most primordial religiosity—that of the Cult of the Ancestors, of sacred awe (*timor sacro*), which venerated shadowy forests and respected mysterious springs. Thus one rediscovers an animistic spirituality, where there are no sumptuous temples, masonry buildings, or marble columns, but frugal sacred spaces, open-air enclosures built around trees. To quote Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* XII, 3): "we do not worship statues gleaming with gold and ivory more than the groves, and in them the very silences themselves". We return to a natural, archaic dimension, and it is precisely this archaism that allows us to connect with similar cultures and religions which, through tenacity or simple isolation, have managed to remain pure, appearing to us more familiar than ever. By exploring Shinto formulas, Vedic severity, and the rhythmic dances of African and Native American peoples, I understood that there exists an underground thread uniting peoples very distant in space and time—traces of a common ancestral memory that explains how distances are merely artificial. All faiths converge in a single archetype, sinking their roots into the same furrow, a trace in the soil left by the first man who left Africa to begin his adventure across the world, dividing into civilizations that for millennia preferred to fight one another. But it need not end this way: if we water that furrow, something beautiful will grow. Here, thanks to these intercultural elements, I have succeeded in making ancient Roman Religion more alive than ever, without distorting its soul; on the contrary, I have brought it back to its starting point, to that authentic and primitive feeling that gathered the shepherds of the Seven Hills around a sacred oak atop the Capitoline. That was the first temple of Rome.

In these pages, Roman religion reveals itself not as a distant echo of a lost past but as a living reflection of a humanity that, through rites and symbols, has always sought to dialogue with the divine. The

veneration of trees, sacred enclosures, offerings of incense and cakes —these are not relics of Antiquity: they are fragments of a universal language, spoken by distant peoples yet united by a common desire for connection and transcendence. Rediscovering these shared elements, integrating them into a ritual practice that does not alter but completes, means not only better understanding Roman and Etruscan spirituality, but also recognizing that something from that furrow can still sprout, bringing cultures and faiths closer in fruitful dialogue. May this manual be a step toward that dialogue, an invitation to cultivate together what unites us, under the shade of a sacred oak, wherever it may grow.

## On Roman Religion

Although this work is intended for those already familiar with the Roman Cult, I will provide a brief preamble to explain its basic concepts. Let us therefore begin by speaking directly of the main subject: the rite. Rituals and ceremonies were a central part of a Roman's life; the concept of secularism was alien to him, and religion blended into every aspect of his daily existence, both public and private. The rite was a crucial cultural practice which, according to the Romans, allowed for the stipulation of a sort of contract, a pact, between the human community and the deities—an agreement nourished and renewed through continuity. Through the rite, one offers something to the Gods (sacrifices, vows, offerings) in order to receive protection, prosperity, and stability in return; it is a fair exchange that can be summarized in the formula **do ut des** (I give so that you may give), a rule that explains how important law was to the Romans, but also how the deities were treated as legal subjects with whom humans could enter into contractual relationships where both parties must benefit. This is because the Romans conceived of worship not as an act of inner faith or disinterested devotion, but as a reciprocal exchange, and this mechanism ensured the maintenance of that pact called **Pax Deorum** (the Peace with the Gods), that is, the harmonious balance that guaranteed the well-being of the community. One can already see from this how the group was more important than the individual—not that the individual had no role; on the contrary, Rome laid the foundations of private law—but the emphasis on collective well-being, on the **Res Publica**, underscores how worship was more a public and communal act than an individual one; even in private rites, the pact involved the entire family or clan, never a single individual. Cicero goes further and in *De Legibus* II, 30 states that private worship cannot be fully practiced without the support and control of public officials, because all rites, even private ones, are valid only if inserted within the framework of the **Sacra Publica**, which must be oriented toward maintaining the well-being

of the entire community. However, individual devotional practices were widely performed—the **ex voto** are the most well-known and documented example—but this did not contradict the role of collective worship; on the contrary, such practices were not only tolerated but encouraged and perfectly integrated into the Roman religious system, provided they did not conflict with the *Sacra Publica* and, ideally, contributed to the overall *Pax Deorum*. When individual devotion turns into isolation and selfishness, it becomes the worst of evils: again Cicero (*De Natura Deorum* II, 72) explicitly says that one who prays for himself alone, following only personal interests or fears, falls into the category of **superstition**, since true religion (from the Latin *relegĕre*, to gather, to bind) is what unites all in the collective interest, thus superstition must be kept away from religion. Today, rediscovering the *Religio Romana* means avoiding both individual superstition and ideological reconstructions, instead returning to a pragmatic, communal, and respectful relationship with the divine and natural world.

Rites, even when private or concerning a single individual, must always keep in mind a greater good—whether the community, our country, the family, or even all of humanity. The Gods are everywhere, dwelling in every place, in every tree; it would be a crime to claim exclusivity over these vital forces rooted in the world itself, to which we too are connected. Yet the rite alone is not sufficient to maintain the Peace with the Gods: it is a **fragile agreement** that can be broken by our errors, voluntary or involuntary, which is why every function, every single gesture, requires care, attention, and precision. Even a mispronounced accent can compromise the validity of the rite. This manual aims to be a guide precisely to avoid such errors and to help you restore that relationship with the natural and divine world, according to Roman usage.

Does the Roman rite require some special form of attire? This is a topic often debated in reenactment and neopagan circles, with gross errors and unfounded interpretations that need to be resolved. The Romans, even during sacred functions, wore the same everyday clothing, with obvious differences depending on social rank: pontiffs and magistrates are depicted with typical patrician footwear, not because it had a ritual role but simply as a status symbol. Even the toga, the pride of every free citizen, was the everyday one, but in this case its presence could be functional to the rite: indeed, during the act it was customary to **cover the head** (except for chthonic, agricultural, or foreign deities), done by pulling up a fold of the cloak. Therefore, it was not the toga itself that was a sacred garment so much as covering the head had a role and motivation linked to the liturgy, as visual separation and ritual concentration (we will see this better later). This means there was no "religious uniform," and the attire of the officiant varied according to rank and political role. What do you need to ritualize? Concentration, respect, and a veil over the head (except in cases we will see)—you do not need a toga or to dress like an ancient magistrate; you are praying, not doing historical reenactment; it is not a spectacle. The only thing I feel like suggesting is to wear **colors** suitable to the context—those did have meaning, and the Romans attached great importance to them—so light colors were used in most religious functions as symbols of purity, while dark colors (black, dark blue) for funerary rites.

Another issue I often hear regarding attire is the presence or absence of **knots**. These were seen as a bond (*vinculum*) that could limit or obstruct the flow of the *Numen* (the sacred vital force), but it was a highly **specific and contextual** prohibition found only among the numerous obligations and taboos of the *Flamen Dialis* and a few other flamens. This is connected more to an idea of ritual freedom than to a condemnation or ban on knots. The Romans wore knots (belts, laces) during religious functions; in particular military ceremonies and foundational rites, it was customary to wear the toga

in the *cinctus Gabinus* manner, which involved tying and knotting the garment around the waist. Thus the issue of knots was not a universal practice but a prohibition tied only to a few specific contexts. On the contrary, in many other cases, tying and knotting something (altars, trees, sacred objects) was a **positive and devotional** act that did not limit or imprison the *Numen*, but served to mark and consecrate. If ancient Roman priests and pontiffs wore knots, belts, and laces, you can do so too—unless you want to live like a flamen, but I do not recommend it. Speaking of flamens, I have come across, in reading reenactment and New Age works on "Roman" themes, the claim that wearing shoes is a sort of ritual obligation. I mention flamens because, besides the ban on knots, they could not even wear footwear, so I find it strange that those who interpret the flamen's knot taboo as a universal rule then prescribe wearing shoes—another thing expressly forbidden to flamens (or at least the *Flamen* of Jupiter). In short, how are these rules made? One takes what one likes and discards the rest, or interprets it according to what is convenient? The belt is no good, but shoe laces yes? If you ban one for "flows," you must ban the other too. But in reality it was not so, and Roman priests wore belts, laces, and shoes **during** rites. Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* XXVIII, 59) tells us that the crossings to avoid during rites and prayers are those of **fingers**, **arms**, and **legs**, but he does not specify the reasons, limiting himself to citing the myth of Hercules' birth. No mention of energy flows. As I said earlier, these taboos and prohibitions were extremely specific and contextual, not universal rules; such details should not be extrapolated and extended to all Roman ritual practice. These are errors that not only contaminate the religion but **generalize** what for the Ancients was not generalized; similar interpretations find no confirmation in the sources and lead to paradoxes and contradictions as seen earlier (belt no but shoes yes). In modern esoteric circles, especially linked to certain **political and ideological** environments, there is a tendency to reinterpret ancient religion by inserting rules and ideas often contradicted by the Romans themselves. For example, the obligation

to wear shoes is justified by isolating the priest, especially from the earth which might somehow contaminate him. In reality, if flamens did not wear footwear, it was precisely to maintain direct and perpetual contact with the earth and its energies. These esoteric interpretations feed the idea that ancient civilizations were solar and Olympian, hierarchical, and always oriented toward the sky and the exaltation of superiority, so a true "man" does not contaminate himself with dirty earth. It was exactly the opposite. The Romans wore shoes during rites (except in cases specifically requiring bare feet, like funerary and agricultural rites), not for a religious function but a practical one. It was a necessity, not a rule. I conclude the topic by recalling that Roman religion derives from the Etruscan one, and in many Etruscan votive images and statuettes showing priests in the act of ritualizing, they have **bare feet**. I venture to say that ritualizing with or without footwear, or with or without knots, is an individual choice; any decision will not compromise the rite.

Often, still in reenactment circles, it is recommended to **abstain** from sex and certain foods (alcohol, stimulating drinks, red meat) the day or hours before a rite. Here too we are dealing with **isolated and limited prohibitions** that are decontextualized and generalized. The only one who explicitly mentions the need to abstain from animal meat is Ovid (*Fasti* IV, 657); no ancient source **prescribes systematic fasts or food prohibitions** in preparation for ordinary functions; Plutarch (*Quaestiones Romanae* 109-112) lists the numerous taboos, including dietary ones, of the *Flamen Dialis*, but these are permanent constraints tied to a specific priestly function, not norms valid for all. On avoiding sexual relations, as far as we know it applied only to the Vestals (vow of chastity), and to some priests (flamens, *Rex Sacrorum*) in certain contexts and specific days. Again, no general rule handed down by the sources, except again Ovid (always in *Fasti* IV, 657) who indicates abstaining from "conjunctions of Venus" before a particular expiatory rite by Numa. The confusion probably arises from the influence of **modern**

**esoteric and neopagan practices**, or from projecting onto Rome customs typical of mystery cults (Eleusis, etc.) where fasting and abstinence were part of preparation, and presumably also from Christian influences (the Roman man never saw sexuality as something sacrilegious or contaminating). The only thing required before a Roman rite was **ablutions, wearing clean clothes, and avoiding impure contacts** (mourning, death, menstrual blood—cf. Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII, 78, but on the effects of menstruation he speaks more as popular legend than religious warning); this is how one kept pure before offering to the Gods. Therefore, it is not necessary to fast or abstain sexually before an ordinary Roman rite. **The ancient sources do not prescribe it**. It is enough to be clean, concentrated, and respectful: *pietas* lies in intention and precision, not in asceticism. But if before a rite you wish to eat moderately (which should be more a general habit, consistent with Roman *frugalitas*, rather than a religious prohibition) or abstain from certain activities, no one can stop you.

A very widespread custom in modern Roman Cult is to **turn to the right**, or make a full turn on oneself, at the end of a rite. Here too I must make clarifications to provide a more accurate picture consistent with the original sources. Plutarch speaks of it as a prescription of Numa (*Life of Numa* 14.4-5): «and also the fact that they turn on themselves while praying […] some turn completely on themselves, others only the face. Some say that Numa introduced this custom because he wanted the faithful, as the world is round and turns on itself, to imitate the movement of the Universe in prayer.» The direction **to the right** is confirmed by Plautus (*Curculio* 70) «*si Deos salutas, dextroversum censeo»* and the rotary motion is further described by Livy (*A.U.C.* V, 21), performed by Camillus at the end of a vow during the battle of Veii. The gesture therefore finds confirmation in the sources, and apparently **always at the end** of a rite, prayer, or vow. Plutarch interprets it in a Greek and Pythagorean cosmological key, anachronistic for Numa's era, but this gesture may

have **Etruscan origins**, where motion to the left (counter-clockwise) traces sacred and foundational boundaries, so motion to the right (clockwise) creates annulment. It is no coincidence, therefore, that we find it always as closure or greeting, as if the gesture served to "dissolve" or interrupt communication with the sacred. However, it seems an **occasional**, recognized, and common practice, but **not normative**. Cicero, Varro, Servius—authors who list technical ritual details—are silent on this gesture, and the Romans left nothing unsaid if it would invalidate a rite; thus I suggest it as an optional apotropaic *sigillum*. Another optional but equally popular gesture, overused today, is the *adoratio*, that is, kissing the hand in spontaneous homage and veneration toward the deities. Visually evocative, but the sources speak of it more as a passing greeting (when entering a temple or passing before a sacred icon) than as a codified gesture inserted into the ritual structure. If we want to speak of ritual gestures, Macrobius (*Sat.* III, 9.12) explains that the palms of the hand should be **raised** toward the sky for celestial deities, **lowered** toward the earth for chthonic ones, and touching the **chest** when receiving a vow.

A large part of the manual will be dedicated to the delimitation of sacred spaces. The Romans attached great importance to places and boundaries, especially when hosting religious functions. Contrary to certain modern interpretations that imagine the priest "metaphysically isolated" in a protected void from external influences, the Romans conceived sacred space as something **integrated into the world**, not separated from it. There was no idea of a rigid "magic circle" or impenetrable barrier traced for every rite: when the rite took place in an already consecrated temple (*aedes* or permanent *templum*), the space was sacred by definition and required no re-delimitation. But outside temples—in the home, in a field, in a wood, or in a public place—the Romans **often delimited temporary sacred spaces** to concentrate the divine *Numen* and temporarily separate the rite from the profane. In **auspices** or public assemblies

(*Comitia*), the augur delimited a temporary *templum* with verbal formulas (*effatio*) and the *lituus* (curved staff), observing the sky from an elevated point or augural tent (*tabernaculum*). Varro (*De Lingua Latina* VII, 2) describes it explicitly: the space was defined with precise words to make the auspices valid. In agrarian rites (such as the *lustratio campi* described by Cato in *De Agri Cultura* 141), a sacred boundary was created with a circular procession around the land, bringing sacrificial victims (*Suovetaurilia*) to purify and delimit the area. In *luci* (sacred groves) or around venerated trees (such as the *Ficus Ruminalis* at the foot of the Palatine), the space was naturally sacralized, often with offerings tied to branches or again processions. These boundaries were not "magical" or arbitrary: they served to focus attention, purify, and **invite the divine**, but remained flexible and contextual. They did not isolate the officiant from the world, but connected him better to it.

Another concept I must explain, and which I have often named in the course of this prologue, is the **Numen**. Not a God but a **divine will**, not a personified being but an impersonal presence, an **active force**, a **sacred power** that manifests dynamically and often fleetingly. It lives and hides everywhere; you can recognize it more clearly in springs and wild nature. "*Lucus Numen inest*" said Ovid (*Fasti* III, 296) before a dark and impenetrable forest, that is "here dwells a *Numen*". The *Numen* is not separate from the Gods but represents their energetic and impersonal aspect; it is not a God itself but **the way the divine acts in the world**. It is the manifestation of those forces that animate the Universe. In summary, the *Numen* represents that sense of immanent sacred that the Romans felt everywhere—a crucial concept in Roman spirituality where animistic and universal echoes are evident, a world inhabited by these forces that must be respected and honored with precise rites so as not to disturb the *Pax Deorum*.

Throughout the book, the relationship between humans and nature will be highlighted, and how this is not mere scenery but the

**principal sacred space** within which religion is lived. The Gods live in nature, especially the wild and uncontaminated kind that inspires respect and sacred awe. Rome does not distance itself from nature; it coexists with it: the city teems with sacred groves, springs, and caves; many temples have gardens and venerated trees. There is no separation; nature is **sacralized and incorporated** into the urban fabric. Deities manifest in nature, and it is through nature that man manages to come into contact with them. Every tree is a temple, the song of birds is the voice of the Gods, every wild animal could be the manifestation of a *Numen*. This is not a hippie or sentimental discourse; it is exactly how the Romans, and the Etruscans before them, lived the sacred, which cannot exist far from or without nature. Rediscovering the *Religio Romana* means primarily **returning to nature**, respecting and venerating it, seeking ways for future society to coexist with it, just as it happened in Rome. I would like this to be the meaning of this manual: not merely learning formulas and rites, but **opening oneself again** to a world teeming with life.

# RECONSTRUCTED PUBLIC ROMAN RITE

## Description of context and operational text of the rite:

## 1. Preparation of the place and the officiants

**Sources:** Ovid, *Fasti*; Cato, *De Agri Cultura*; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*.

The place (*templum* or consecrated space) must be cleaned physically and spiritually.

**Tools:**

- Brazier (*focus*) and altar (*ara*).
- Lustral water (*aqua caduca*) taken from a pure spring or rain.
- Bronze plates (*aera*), used for apotropaic sound.
- Incense, spelt, wine or cakes.
- Laurel or olive branch for aspersion.

**Capite velato:** for the superior Gods the head is covered with the fold of the toga.

Not covered: for chthonic deities (Dis, Proserpina), Saturn (Macrobius, *Sat.* I, 8.2), and sometimes for foreign deities (*Graecus rite*).

**Analogies:**

- **Shinto:** priests purify the area with *sakaki* branches and water.
- **Greek rites:** use of laurel branches for purification.
- **Vedic India:** preparation of the sacrificial area with water and fire, designation of the vedi.

Not recited, preparatory phase.

## 2. Lustration and purification

- The officiant sprinkles the four sides of the place and the altar with lustral water.
- Incense is burned while the bronze plates are struck three times (*tintinnabulum* or *aera*).
- Meaning: to make the area *mundus*, separated from the profane.

**Sources:** Ovid, *Fasti* V, 441-444 (use of bronzes to drive away the Lemures).

**Analogies:**

- **Shinto:** shaking the *ōnusa* (staff with paper strips) and ringing bells (*suzu*).
- **Ancient China:** gongs and bells to drive away harmful spirits.

**Ablution of the officiant:**

**Proposed Latin**: "*Aqua fluens sordes abluat, labes eximat. Purus sum, puriter accedo*."

**English**: "May flowing water wash away impurities, remove stains. I am pure, I approach in purity."

**Execution of the ablution:**

- Hand washing: "*Aqua fluens sordes abluat, labes eximat*" while pouring the water.
- Pouring on the face: "*Purus sum, puriter accedo*" while the water flows, completing the purification.

Ancient sources (Varro, Livy, Macrobius) confirm the ritual ablution before the ceremony, but no formulas are reported. For the reconstruction I based myself on the reinterpretation and Latin translation of ancient purifying prayers from the *Harae no Kotoba*.

Once the ablution is completed, the rite can begin.

**Command for silence**

Before starting, the officiant raises his right hand (or the *lituus* if present) and proclaims:

***Favete linguis!***

(Propitiate with the tongue: maintain sacred silence, pronounce only auspicious words).

This formula, of Etruscan origin and attested in Roman rituals, establishes the necessary **silentium** so that no inauspicious word or profane noise interrupts communication with the divine. According to custom, silence can be accompanied by a continuous sound of *tibiae* to mask any external noises.

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# 3. Opening to Janus

Always at the beginning, Janus opens the way to the Gods: "in every circumstance [...] it was established that in sacrifices Janus should be invoked first (Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II, 67)".

**Prayer:**

"*Ianus pater, primus Deorum, custos liminum, pandens et claudens, tibi primum precor, hoc thure obmovendo bonas preces offero, uti sis volens propitius in operibus nostris.*"

"Janus father, first of the Gods, guardian of thresholds, who opens and closes, to you first I address prayer; with this incense I offer good supplications, so that you may be benevolent and propitious in our works."

**Incense is offered.**

"*Iane pater, uti te thure obmovendo bonas preces bene precatus sum, eiusdem rei ergo macte vino inferio esto.*"

"Janus father, as I have offered you this incense with good prayers, so may you accept this poured wine as well."

**The wine offering is completed.**

**Sources:** prayer reconstructed based on Cato (*De Agri Cultura* 134) where Janus is offered *strue*, a layered cake, but in that occasion it has a central role, here instead it assumes its canonical role as opener of rites (Ovid, *Fasti* I, 65-288; Macrobius, *Sat.* I, 9.9; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II, 67), therefore the prayer has been adapted to this function and the cake replaced with incense, ideal for an offering that aims to attract the attention of the *Numina* before the invocation of the main deity. The original formula describes the sacrifice of a sow for the blessing of the field (agrarian rite), where Janus is invoked together with Jupiter. No source (Ovid, Cicero) says that at the beginning of rites besides Janus one must invoke Jupiter as well, it is therefore concluded that it is a peculiarity of the agrarian rituals transmitted by Cato, where Jupiter is required as God of rain and fertility. Consequently, in this reconstructed version, for the initial offering only the formulas dedicated to Janus have been used, without Jupiter, whose functions in this context are not necessary. The references to the house and family have been changed to emphasize the public and communal aspect.

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# 4. Homage to the Lares and Genii

- Placed **before** the main deity, as guarantors of the place and protectors of the ritual passage.
- Offering: spelt grains and incense.

**Reason**: in religions of archaic structure, local powers are honored first, then the guest deity.

**Analogies:**

- **Shinto:** greeting to the *Ujigami* before the main *Kami*.
- **Traditional Chinese:** offering to the *Tudigong*, spirit of the place.

> "*Lares et Genii huius loci, vos precor ut hunc locum purum et tutum teneatis, et preces nostras ad Deos rite perducatis.*"

"Lares and Genii of this place, I pray you to keep this space pure and safe, and to conduct our prayers to the Gods correctly."

(Reconstructed prayer, no real source but consistency with Roman ritual practice is maintained)

# Sacrificium Dei: prayers and offerings to the Deity of the rite

## 5. Datio (sacred giving, main gift, the act of delivery)

- It is offered to the deities recipients of the rite.
- Typical offerings: spiced cakes, substantial gifts.
- Position: facing the altar/hearth; feet firmly planted, upright posture. Do not cross arms or legs.

**Latin:**

> "[Nomen dei]*, te hoc fercto obmovendo bonas preces precor, uti sis volens propitius communitati atque Rei Publicae, mactus hoc ferto.*"

**English:**

"[Name of the deity], with this offering and with good prayers I beseech you, so that you may be benevolent and propitious to the community and to the Public Thing; be increased by this offering."

**The cake is offered.**

**Sources:** Cato, *De Agri Cultura* 134. The original formula refers to Jupiter, here used as a standard ritual base. The *ferctum* is another sacrificial cake, but more complex in nature than the *strue*, not described by Cato but hypothesized to be a stuffed bread, perhaps with honey, dried fruit or other ingredients. Here too the blessings have been made collective to emphasize the public nature of the rite, and the blessing for the Public Thing has been added as it appears in Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* I, 20.

## 6. Auctio (from *augeo*, offering that increases)

The offering is shown to the sky and then placed on the fire or altar.

The priest recites the consecration formula.

**Latin:**

> "*Macte virtute esto,* [Nomen dei]*, hoc dono dato!*"

**English:**

"Be increased in power, [Name of the deity], with this gift offered!"

Formula reconstructed consistently with the Roman ritual structure based again on Cato, where in his rite this part anticipated the *immolatio*, the sacrifice of an animal. The reconstructed Cultus draws inspiration from the laws of the founder of the *Religio*, Numa Pompilius, so we do not shed blood but pour wine, milk, fruit or salted spelt flour.

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## 7. Piaculum

> Function: to compensate for involuntary errors, ensuring that the sacrifice is still accepted.

**Sources:** Cato, *De Agri Cultura* 141-143.

**Analogies:**

- **Vedic:** *prāyaścitta* of expiation.
- **Shinto:** purification formulas *harai norito*.

> "*Dique Deaeque omnes, si quid vobis in illis donis meis neque satisfactum est, vobis hoc piaculum do dono dico.*"

"Gods and Goddesses all, if in any of those gifts offered to you there has been no satisfaction, for this I offer, give and dedicate this piaculum."

The formula is inspired by Cato, but the parts concerning blood sacrifices have been replaced.

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## 8. Closing offering to Vesta

- Function: to seal the rite in the sacred fire.
- Offering: spelt and salt thrown into the brazier (Ovid, *Fasti* I, 335).

  "Vesta mater, custos ignis aeterni, tibi hunc ritum committo; serva puritatem sacrificii."

"Vesta mother, guardian of the eternal fire, to you I entrust this rite; preserve the purity of the sacrifice."

Proposed prayer. Ancient sources offer only hints, insufficient to reconstruct a formula. Vesta always closes the rite: "as for Vesta [...] she is always the last to be invoked and receive sacrifices (Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II, 67)".

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## 9. Sigillum ritus

The officiant looks at the crowd and says solemnly, dismissing those present:

**“Rite factum est; illicet.”**

The rite has been correctly performed; you may go (the same formula **illicet** also closed assemblies, from Latin *ire licet* → it is permitted to go, not a ritual formula but a word of dismissal).

## 10. Collective concluding part

- Those present clap their hands **three or nine times** (ritual number).
- Choir: *Bona fortuna sit!* (Good Fortune be!)

**Analogies:**

- **Shinto:** ritual applause *kashiwade*.
- **African and Chinese rites:** hand clapping as spiritual seal.

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## 11. Post-ritual sacred

- Personal offerings in the fire.
- Possible repetition of parts if errors are detected.

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## 12. Festive part

- Music, dances, banquet (*convivium*) with offered foods.

**Analogies:**

- **Panathenaea:** banquet after procession.
- **Matsuri:** food shared between community and priests.

# PRIVATE ROMAN RITE

# reconstructed and commented form

**Context:** domestic rite addressed to a specific deity, performed by the *paterfamilias* or *materfamilias*, with the participation of the members of the *domus*.

**Main sources:** Cato (*De Agri Cultura*), Ovid (*Fasti*), Pliny (*Naturalis Historia*), Macrobius (*Saturnalia*), Servius (*Ad Aeneid*), Cicero (*De Natura Deorum*).

## 1. Preliminary preparation (Purificatio et Praeparatio)

**Objective**: purify the space and prepare it for the presence of the sacred.

- **Physical cleaning** of the ritual area (hearth or lararium) and orderly arrangement of objects.
- **Lustratio**: sprinkling of lustral water (*aqua salsa* = water + salt) – **source**: Varro and Pliny mention the use of salt in purifying rites.
- **Incensum**: burning incense, myrrh or local resin; the smoke drives away impurities.

**Apotropaic tools:**

- *tintinnabula* or bronze plates struck three times (Ovid mentions them as a deterrent for evil spirits; analogues: *suzu* bells in Shinto, bronze plates in China).
- Sweet music or recitation of rhythmic formulas, useful for creating separation between the profane and sacred world (analogue: Vedic *mantra* or Buddhist *sutra*).

## 2. Disposition of the celebrant

- **Capite velato** (head covered by veil or fold of the toga): standard rule in public and domestic cults to the superior Gods.
- **Exceptions**: Macrobius (*Sat.* I, 8.2) → chthonic, foreign or specific cults (e.g. Saturn, Honor) = **head uncovered**.
- **Position**: facing the altar/hearth; feet firmly planted, upright posture. Do not cross arms or legs.
- **Gesture**: palm raised for superior Gods, lowered for chthonic ones (Macrobius, *Sat.* III, 9.12).

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## 3. Opening of the Rite

**Mandatory initial formula** → Invocation to **Janus**.

- **Source**: Cicero (*De Natura Deorum* II, 67) → "In sacrifices Janus is invoked first".
- **Offerings**: incense, pure wine (*libum vini*), or simple cake.

**Exemplary formula** (reconstructed Latin, not canonical):

> "*Iane pater, te primum precor, quaeso, veneror, uti sis volens propitiusque huic sacrificio.*"

"O father Janus, I pray to you first, I beseech and venerate you, so that you may be benevolent and propitious to this sacrifice."

**Incense is offered.**

> "*Thure macte esto, vino inferio macte esto.*"

"Be consecrated with incense, be consecrated with poured wine."

**The wine is poured.**

## 4. Homage to the Lares and Genii

(Reconstruction) – No source codifies a fixed position in the private rite, but:

> **Motivation**: they are the tutelary numina of the house and place → function as guarantors and purifiers.
>
> **Intercultural analogies:**

- Shinto: *Jinushigami* (protective deities of the house) always honored before the main *Kami*.
- China: cult to *Dìzhǔ shén*, domestic version of *Tudigong*.

> **Typical offering**: wine or milk + small portion of the rite's food.

**Formula:**

> "*Laribus familiaribus Genio huius loci, preces et dona libo, uti faveatis.*"

"To the familial Lares and the Genius of this place, I offer prayers and gifts, so that you may be propitious."

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## 5. Sacra domestica: invocation and offering to the Main Deity

**Central phase** of the rite.

Offerings proportionate to the deity:

- Pure or mixed wine
- Ritual cakes (*liba*, *mola salsa*) – **source**: Pliny, Cato.
- Incense or herbs specific to the deity (rosemary, laurel, etc.).

The prayer must be precise and complete → **Vedic analogue**: in *yajña* verbal errors invalidate the rite, requiring repetition.

**Formula:**

> "[Nomen dei]*, te precor quaeso venerorque uti sis volens propitiusque mihi, liberisque meis, domo familiaeque nostrae.*"

"[Name of the deity] I invoke you with just invocations so that you may be benevolent and propitious to me, my children, the house and our family."

**The cake is offered.**

**Formula:**

> "[Nomen dei]*, quod tibi sacrum est, in familia mea vino dapis macte esto.*"

"[Name of the deity] what is sacred to you, in my family be increased with the wine of the offering."

**The wine is poured.**

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# 6. Piaculum

- **Function**: sacrifice/expression of apology in case of ritual imperfections.
- **Source**: Cato, Livy, Virgil → act of "purgation" for possible errors or desecrations.
- **Position**: traditionally **before the closing to Vesta**, to ensure that the tutelary deity of the hearth receives a rite free of impurity.
- Simple offering: wine or grain.

**Formula:**

"*Dique Deaeque omnes, quod vobis illis donis meis neque satisfactum est, vos hoc piaculo.*"

"Gods and Goddesses all, if with those gifts of mine you have not been satisfied, this piaculum I offer."

**Analogies:**

- In Vedic rites: *prayascitta* (immediate expiatory acts).
- Shinto**:** *harai* to correct spiritual impurities.

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## 7. Closing with Vesta

- **Source**: Cicero → "Vesta is always the last to be invoked and receive sacrifices".
- Offering: pure wine, cake, salted spelt flour.

  **Formula:**

  "Vesta mater, custos sacri ignis, accipe haec dona et domum nostram serva."

"Vesta mother, guardian of the sacred fire, accept these gifts and protect our house."

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## 8. Collective involvement (reconstructed part)

**Celebration of the sigillum:**

- Clapping of hands **3 or 9 times** (analogues: triple steps in Lemuria – Ovid or in Carmina Arvalia; use of the number 3 in many archaic cultures).

  **Choral formula:**

  "Bona fortuna sit!"

**Analogies:**

- Shinto: *kashiwade* (hand clapping to attract divine attention).
- West African: ritual clapping in honor of spirits.

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## 9. Post-Rite

- **Check**: the celebrant verifies that no phase has been omitted or erroneous.
- Individual offerings by those present: incense or small libations on the still-lit brazier (analogue: Hindu *prasad*, Buddhist individual offerings).
- **Convivium**: common banquet with the non-offered part of the food, symbol of communion between man and deity (analogue: Greek sacred banquets, Shinto *naorai*).

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## Simple daily rites

Upon waking, in front of the domestic edicule greet the Gods of the house, the family and the spirits of the place.

**Recite the formula**: "*Quod hic dies bonum faustum felix fortunatumque sit mihi, domo familiaeque nostrae*"

**English:** "May this day be good, auspicious, happy and fortunate for me, our house and our family"

Then offer a stick of incense (practical and convenient, no need for a thurible), or grains of salt, salted flour, spelt grains, or salted water. These are all "cold" and immediate offerings already kept in the edicule, to be poured on the unlit brazier or left on the shelf.

After the offering, clap hands three times as a gesture of good omen.

**Sources:** the prayer is a fusion of Cicero's augural formula (*De Divinatione* I, 102) "*quod bonum faustum felix fortunatumque sit*" plus the dedications from Cato already explored.

## Thanksgiving offering before the meal

Before consuming a meal, show respect and thanks to the Numi of the house and place.

**Recite the formula**: "*Di familiares, donum hoc offero*"

**English:** "Familial Gods, I offer you this gift"

Pour a small thanksgiving offering.

**Sources:** this formula is proposed, not present in ancient sources, although we know of small preliminary offerings, such as the *libatio* of wine or the deposition of food portions on the hearth in honor of the domestic Lares, before starting to consume the meal. The practice of thanksgiving acts preceding the meal is therefore present in the habit of the ancient Romans, and similar practices survive in countless cultures. Here I wanted to blend the Japanese tradition of **Itadakimasu** with Roman ritual practicality by proposing a formula that is equally simple, immediate and easy to memorize.

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In this schema we have the **entire documented sequence** where possible, and marked as reconstruction where necessary, with tools, postures, formulas, sources and analogies.

The rites thus become **technically executable** and historically justifiable, without mixing unnoted inventions. Following is an in-depth exploration of the various liturgical aspects, as far as direct testimonies allow and when – **and why** – to integrate compatible ritual elements from other cultures.

# RATIO ET USUS RITUUM

## On the capite velato

In traditional Roman religion, the priest or officiant covered his head with the fold of the toga (*capite velato*) during public and private rites dedicated to the **superior Gods** (celestial and benevolent).

This posture had a twofold purpose:

1. **Symbolic separation** from the profane world — the veil created a "sacred space" around the face.
2. **Ritual protection** from foreign or hostile influences during communication with the deity.

Countless literary and artistic sources confirm the practice of covering the head during the performance of religious functions; this is the most recognizable distinctive sign of Roman priests.

## When the head was not veiled

Not all rites required the veil. Macrobius (*Saturnalia* I, 8.2) specifies that for **chthonic** deities (linked to the underworld) and some **foreign** deities introduced to Rome, rites were performed **capite aperto**.

Examples:

- **Saturn** (though not strictly chthonic) received sacrifices **without the veil.** The same applies to Honor (Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae* 13).
- Some cults of Greek and Eastern origin, such as those of Cybele or Isis, had different modalities, often with the head uncovered.

The principle was clear:

- **Capite velato** → Olympian, protective deities linked to light and order.
- **Capite aperto** → chthonic deities, foreign deities or those with liminal value.

## Analogues in other cultures

- **Etruscans**: not demonstrable in ritual acts, but funerary iconography often shows solemn figures, men and women, with the head covered by the toga.
- **Greece**: on the contrary, the Greeks usually officiated with the **head uncovered**, except in rare particular cases.
- **Hinduism**: in some *pūjā*, the head may be covered for respect and symbolic separation, especially in rites to protective deities.
- **Shinto**: the priest does not cover the head, but the function of "separation from the profane" is performed by other gestures and instruments (e.g. the *hōbei* and purifications).

**Note for the reconstructed rite**

- If dedicated to **superior** deities (Janus, Mars, Jupiter, etc.) → capite velato.
- If addressed to **chthonic** deities (Dis Pater, Proserpina, deities of the dead) or foreign deities with specific cults → capite aperto.
- For deities of mixed nature (e.g. Saturn) follow the specific tradition attested by the sources.

# Delimitation of the Templum, furnishings and sacred spaces

## Form and function of the ornaments

Based on the sources, ornaments on Roman trees could take two main forms, with analogies to Japan (*shimenawa*) and differences linked to the Roman context:

1. **Cloths left to the wind** (signaling of Sacred Area):
    - **Evidence**: the idea of cloths left to the wind to mark a sacred area is supported by Ovid (*Fasti* III, 265), where he describes trees and hedges with ribbons that seem to float or be hung as a signal. This recalls the Japanese *shimenawa*, straw ropes with paper strips (*shide*) that wave to indicate a sacred boundary.
    - **Context**: in Rome, sacred groves (*lucus*) or single trees (e.g. oaks of Jupiter) could be delimited by cloths hung from branches, visible from afar, to warn passers-by not to profane the space.
    - **Material**: probably white wool or light fabric strips, sometimes with colored threads (red/purple), as in the *suffibula* of the Vestals.
2. **Ribbon tied around the tree**:
    - **Evidence**: Virgil (*Aeneid* XII, 765-770) and again Ovid (*Metamorphoses* VIII, 735-750) suggest *vincula* or *vittae* tied around trees, similar to Japanese *shimenawa* wrapped around trunks or branches.
    - **Context**: this practice was more common for individually consecrated trees (a tree dedicated to a specific deity, e.g. Virgil speaks of a wild olive to Faunus and Ovid of an oak to Ceres), where the ribbon served to “bind” the tree symbolically to the deity.
    - **Material**: wool woven into ribbons (*vittae*), often white,

with knots or ties, as described for priestly *infulae*.

## Comparison with Japan

- **Shimenawa**: in Shinto, *shimenawa* are straw ropes with paper or fabric strips, used to mark sacred areas or wrap consecrated trees/objects. They are both a visible boundary and a symbol of purification.
- **Roman *vittae***: Roman *vittae* share the role of sacred demarcation, but were more often of wool and tied or hung, reflecting the material preferred in Roman religion (pure wool, Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* XXVIII, 13). Red/purple could be a ceremonial addition, while *shimenawa* use variable colors (white, red, yellow).
- **Differences**: *shimenawa* are more structured (thick ropes), while *vittae* were light ribbons or bandages, adapted to the Roman context of ritual simplicity.

Ovid clearly indicates that trees could be adorned with cloths or ribbons, and although the term *vittae* is not always explicit, their use is plausible given the meaning of "sacred bindings". They were probably:

- **Cloths hung to the wind** to mark a sacred area (e.g. a *lucus*), similar to *shide* as a visible signal.
- **Ribbons tied around the tree** for individual consecration, also akin to Japanese *shimenawa*.

## Types of fabric used to mark objects and sacred areas

1. **Wrapped fabric** (to sanctify statues, trees and altars):

    - **Description**: a ribbon or band of white wool, potentially with red or purple threads, wrapped around statues, trees and altars to sanction their sacredness.

    **Evidence:**

    - Servius (*Ad Aeneid* II, 133) describes the *vittae* as wool bandages used to adorn statues, altars and *simulacra*.
    - Virgil (*Aeneid* XII, 765-770) mentions a wild olive sacred to

Faunus where sailors hang garments and votive offerings.

- The purple border of the Vestals' *suffibulum* and the *toga praetexta* supports the hypothesis of red/purple threads with protective value.

**Function**: this type of fabric, hung or wrapped, "bound" the object symbolically to the deity, marking it as sacred and protected (*Pax Deorum*). It was an act of dedication, often performed during consecration or festivals (e.g. Vestalia).

**Material**: pure white wool, with possible red/purple threads to highlight ritual importance.

2. **Suspended cloth** (to signal sacred areas):

    - **Description**: a cloth or strip of white wool, with possible red threads, tied to the branches or trunk of a tree and left suspended, used to signal entry into a sacred area (e.g. a *lucus*).

    **Evidence:**

    - Ovid (*Fasti* III, 259-268) describes the presence in Diana's grove of long fabrics, like veils, hanging from trees to signal the divine presence.
    - Servius (*Ad Aeneid* III, 22) links ribbons to the signaling of sacred places, including groves, where they could be suspended to delimit the space.

    **Function**: This cloth, floating in the wind, served as an apotropaic boundary, warning passers-by of entry into a consecrated area and protecting it from profane influences.

    **Material**: light white wool, sometimes with red/purple accents, chosen for its purity and visibility.

## Definition of the proposed terms

1. **Vittae**:

    - **Description**: ribbons or bands of white wool (with possible purple threads), wrapped around statues, altars and trees to sanction their sacredness.
    - **Basis**: derives from the verb *vincire* ("to bind") and the meaning of *vittae* as sacred bandages (Servius and Ovid use this term for the fabrics that wrap). Although not always explicitly associated with trees, their use on consecrated objects (statues, altars) is attested, and the extension to single trees is confirmed.
    - **Use**: represents an act of static dedication, "binding" the object to the deity.

2. **Vincula**:

    - **Description**: cloths or strips of white wool, tied to the branches or trunk of a tree and left suspended, used to signal entry into a sacred area (e.g. a *lucus*).
    - **Basis**: the term *vincula* (bindings, plural of *vinculum*) is used by Servius and is ideal for describing hanging fabrics as signals, although Ovid and Varro prefer *licium* for this type of bandage (another term to consider). Although *vincula* indicates bindings in general, we adapt it here for suspended cloths, distinguishing it from *vittae*.
    - **Use**: dynamic function of delimitation, visible and apotropaic, similar to Japanese *shide*.

## Integration into the Reconstructed Rite

For consecration, *vittae* are used — white wool ribbons (with red threads if ceremonial) — wrapped around altars, statues and sacred trees. To mark sacred areas, such as *luci*, *vincula* are used — wool cloths suspended from branches or the trunk, visible as a divine boundary.

**Ritual formula:**

- **For the *Vittae***: "*Hanc aram vitta alba orno, ut sit sacer*" (I adorn this altar with a white *vitta*, so that it may be sacred), or "*Hanc arborem vitta alba orno…*" if it is a tree.
- **For the *Vincula***: "*Hunc locum vinculo albo signo, ut sit tutus*" (I mark this place with a white *vinculum*, so that it may be protected).

## Signaling Sacred Areas or Temporary Ritual Spaces

Temporary *templa* (sacred spaces delimited for rites, auspices or sacrifices) were marked to separate the sacred from the profane, as described by Varro (*De Lingua Latina* VII, 8-13), who emphasizes the use of "signs" (*signa*) or boundaries to define the *templum*. The sources indicate various methods:

- **Signs or fences**: pictorial and plastic works (e.g. the *Ara Pacis*) reproduce physical boundaries, such as poles or fences, for augural *templa*, often traced with a ritual staff (*lituus*) by the augur and then physically reproduced on the ground.
- **Ropes or bindings**: here too sculptures and frescoes show us ribbons, festoons and draperies around sacred areas, "belts" or ropes to delimit ritual spaces. This could include wool ropes, similar to the *vittae*, used to "bind" the area symbolically.

The *vittae*, as white wool ribbons, were used to adorn and consecrate (e.g. altars or trees as in *Metamorphoses* VIII,744), and their name derives from *vincire* ("to bind"). A long version of the *vittae* – essentially an extended rope – could be theorized as a method to surround the area, creating a flexible and symbolic textile boundary, especially for temporary *templa* in open spaces (e.g. for celestial auspices or rites). This would be consistent with:

- **Apotropaic function**: like a fusion between cloths tied to trees and enclosures around *templa*, a *vitta*-rope could signal and protect the area, embracing the ritual zone.
- **Analogy with the East**: like Japanese *shimenawa* (sacred ropes that surround areas), a long *vitta* could delimit the *templum*, adapting the Roman concept of simplicity (pure wool) to a practical use.

**Theoretical use**: before lustration, the ritual zone is delimited with a long rope woven of white wool (symbol of purity), or white and red (purity and protection), stretched around the area or tied to boundary poles. This creates a symbolic barrier, separating the sacred from the profane and signaling the divine presence. Sources: Varro, *De Lingua Latina* V, 8 (augural boundaries).

**Ritual actions**:

- The officiant (or an assistant) plants four poles at the cardinal points of the area.
- The long *vitta* is stretched between the poles, wrapping it slightly to "bind" the space.
- Offering: incense, or a small libation of wine or spelt to the *vitta*, to propitiate the delimitation.
  **Ritual formula** (to be recited during the delimitation): **Latin**: *Hoc templum vitta pura cingo, ut sit sacer et tutus ab omni profano*. **English**: I gird this *templum* with a pure *vitta*, so that it may be sacred and protected from all profanation.

Recite with solemn tone, circling the area while stretching the *vitta*, to guarantee the integrity of the sacred perimeter.

# Tracing the Templum

**Theory and reconstruction**: the sources have not handed down detailed formulas to us, nor even an explanation, but reconstructing the rite of delimitation of the *templum* is possible. What is the *templum*? It is a sacred space that the priest (the augur) traces mentally in the sky, dividing it into four parts, so as to be able to observe the direction of the divine signs. On occasion this mental space was reproduced on the ground, delimiting an area with cippi, stakes or ropes, and in its center was eventually placed a hut or tent (tabernaculum, but this is not mentioned by older sources). The *templum* is not a building but is first and foremost an **imaginary region** traced in the sky by the priest, and then "brought" to the ground by signalling it with temporary objects; yet we still have the possibility of seeing one in all its splendour: the *Ara Pacis* is nothing other than the monumentalisation of a physical *templum*, where fences and drapes remain impressed in the marble decorations. So we know the concept, how it was made (always with a quadrangular base), but how was it traced? Cicero (*De Divinatione* I,30) explains to us that Romulus used the same procedure before tracing the physical boundary of the city he was founding (the term **Roma Quadrata** is not accidental and is consistent with Etruscan planimetry). We know that castra were built in the same way, and that the augurs were always present with the armies. Both cities and camps therefore followed the same tracing of a *templum*, and this orientation defined urban planning and the organisation of the castra, where the two straight lines, *cardo* and *decumanus*, divided the space into four regions, exactly as the augurs did in the sky. These foundation rites are of Tyrrhenian origin and their rules were established by the **Etrusca Disciplina**. If cities and camps were urban and military versions of a *templum*, then all that remains is to understand how they were traced, and here we have more information.

**Tracing the sacred space**: the two axes that divided the area into four regions were the **cardo** (from north to south) and the **decumanus** (from east to west), the latter was the starting point since it looked **east**, the

auspicious direction of the sky from which the benevolent signs came and toward which the entire *templum* was **oriented** (literally "toward the east"). This is confirmed to us by Livy (*Ab Urbe Condita* I, 18), who also speaks of the instrument for tracing these axes, namely the **lituus**, described as "a curved staff without knots", also named by Cicero (again in *Div.* I, 30) who attributes the name to the similarity with the homonymous military trumpet, but it could have been the opposite. Now we must imagine the augur with this staff in hand who first draws in the sky an axis that goes from east to west, and then from north to south. We have the *cardo* and the *decumanus*. Immediately afterwards, this imaginary drawing would have been reproduced on the ground, and the priest – or assistants – would have placed cippi to delimit its boundaries.

**Direction of the tracing**: at this point we have marked, with the help of the *lituus*, axes in the sky, and then we have transported them to the ground delimiting an area. Now it is necessary to define the boundaries, and in this we are helped by the **rite of foundation** of the city, where a furrow was traced in the ground. Varro is the author who provides us with more details (*De Lingua Latina* V, 143) with the plough drawn by a bull and a cow. The detail that interests us is that the ploughshare (of bronze) was turned inward, raising the earth that created the sacred boundary. Servius (*Ad Aeneid* IV, 212) adds a key element explaining that the cow is inside and the bull outside. Why is this so important? Because the arrangement of the two animals, with the ploughshare in the centre, **is compatible with a leftward tracing**.

The motion was to the left and, following Etruscan logic, it had to start from the **east**, since the east-west axis was the one marked first, in conformity with the orientation of the *templum*, **ut mos Etruscus erat**, that is "as was Etruscan custom", proceeding in **counter-clockwise** sense. This is the way the physical boundary was traced. Its undoing took place in clockwise sense, thus retracing the original path backwards, analogous to how cities were razed.

# Proposed ritual formula for the reconstructed rite

## 1. Preparation and purification

The priest covers his head with a fold of the toga for ritual purity (*capite velato*). He washes his hands with lustral water, and offers incense and libations to the deities of the place and of the boundaries, so that they accept the rite and guard the space. The formula is recited: "**Termine, custos finium sacrorum, Genius loci, si Deus si Dea, qui hanc terram regis et protegis, Lares huius loci, qui hic habitatis et colitis, vos omnes precor et obsecro. Sit vobis placitum hoc opus meum, ut hunc locum sacrum effem et ritus hic peragam. Favete linguis, estote benevoli, et hoc templum accipite, ut Di immortales favorem suum praestent. Sic vos veneror**" that is "Terminus, guardian of the sacred boundaries, *Genius loci*, whether a God or a Goddess, who rules and protects this land, Lares of this place, who dwell and cultivate here, I pray and beseech you all. May this work of mine be pleasing to you, so that I may make this place sacred and perform the rites here. Be propitious with words, be benevolent, and allow our *templum* to be accepted, so that the immortal Gods grant their favour. Thus I venerate you." Assistants (e.g. camilli or minor priests) bring the *lituus*, ropes, stakes (cippi) and materials for the rite. The priest verifies that the place is pure, without contaminations (e.g. corpses or weapons).

## 2. Tracing the Templum in the sky

At this point the priest turns to the east, with the *lituus* in his right hand, raises his gaze to the sky and mentally traces the first axis, the *decumanus*, from east to west, starting from the auspicious direction. Moving the *lituus* in an imaginary arc, he delimits the horizontal axis. Then, tracing the *cardo*, from north to south, he completes the division into four regions. He effas (verbally consecrates) the space with a formula: "**Hoc caelum in regiones divido, ut mos est, ab oriente ad occidentem, a septentrione ad meridiem, et templum effo**" that is "I divide this sky into regions, according to custom, from east to west, from north to south, and I verbally consecrate the *templum*".

## 3. Reproduction on the ground and physical delimitation

The assistants reproduce the axes on the ground, planting cippi (wooden stakes) or positioning stones to delimit the area, starting from the *decumanus* (east-west) as the main axis. The priest, with the *lituus*, verifies the boundaries, ensuring they are aligned with the sky. In the centre is placed the altar or brazier. The priest effas the ground: "**Hunc locum sacrum effo, ut in eo ritus peragantur et Di faventes sint**" that is "I verbally consecrate this sacred place, so that rites may be performed in it and the Gods be favourable".

## 4. Consecration of the visible boundaries

To consecrate the *templum* the priest traces a physical boundary around the perimeter, starting from the east and proceeding counter-clockwise: the ropes are stretched along the poles that delimit the area, reciting the formula already seen for the *vittae*: "**Hoc templum vitta pura cingo, ut sit sacer et tutus ab omni profano**" that is "I gird this *templum* with a pure *vitta*, so that it may be sacred and protected from all profanation."

## 5. Observation of omens and conclusion of the rite

Although this temporary space is for religious rites and not augural, the priest observes a preliminary omen (e.g. flight of birds from the east) to confirm divine favour, as in Cicero I, 30. The officiant positions himself at the centre of the *templum* looking toward the south (*spectans meridiem*, as in Varro VII, 7-8 and Livy cited above), keeping the east to his left (but according to Greek and Trojan usage, and probably also Etruscan, one observes the north, with the benevolent east to the right, as Cicero explains again in *De Divinatione* II, 84) and offers a libation of wine and spelt to Jupiter, pronouncing a prayer for divine favour: "**Iuppiter pater, si est fas hoc templum, quod ego effatus sum, ratum haberi, uti tu signa nobis certa adclarassis inter eos fines, quod feci**" that is "Father Jupiter, if it is lawful that this *templum*, which I have effated, be held valid, grant that you give us certain signs within those boundaries that I have traced" (adapted from Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* I, 18). Regardless of to whom the rite is dedicated, or any future physical temple, Jupiter is always invoked in

this phase, as guarantor and intermediary who through celestial signs puts us in contact with the deities, his presence ensures legitimacy. If the omen is auspicious, he concludes with a final libation: "**Templum acceptum est, ritus nostri faventes sint**" that is "The *templum* is accepted, may our rites be favourable". The *templum* is ready for the religious function, with the priest performing the rites inside, ensuring the presence of the Gods.

## 6. Consecration of a permanent templum

If on the *templum* one wanted to build a permanent *sacellum* (a small open consecrated area to a deity), or even a sacred building, a furrow would have to be dug along the perimeter, as in the foundation rites. In this case, **after** tracing the celestial *templum* it is **necessary** to invoke Jupiter immediately to ask for an omen **before** proceeding with the physical tracing, consistently with ancient sources that agree that auspices precede the foundation of cities and camps. Having obtained the positive response, the deity to whom the *sacellum* is to be dedicated is invoked; now the ground can be incised reciting: "**Hunc sulcum sacrum effo, ut templum tuum sit**" that is "I verbally consecrate this sacred furrow, so that it may be your *templum*" (deduced from Livy I, 44) performed with *cinctus Gabinus* according to the practice of foundation rites. The furrow will then be fenced and delimited with *vittae* to guarantee its protection. For the dedication of the *sacellum*, to be recited once the work is completed, I propose a formula inspired by Heian-era Shinto consecration texts, whose function and liturgy is compatible with the Etruscan-Roman one: "**Timore te invoco,** [Nomen dei]**, precor, ut in hoc loco consecrato accipias et sis propitius ritibus nostris. Sic te veneror**" that is "With fear I invoke you, [Name of the deity], I pray, so that in this consecrated place you may be accepted and be propitious in our rites. Thus I venerate you."

Uniting the sources that describe the augural *templum* with the foundation tracing has been useful to understand how to reconstruct a sacred space; in the same way we can intuit how to demolish it: Servius

(*Ad Aen.* V, 755) explains that the walls were a sacred boundary, and the deconsecration (*exauguratio*) of the city started precisely from the demolition of the same, through a rite of inversion with respect to the consecration.

## Imagination of the rite of destruction of the provisional Templum

1. **Inverse preparation and purification**: the officiant positions himself at the centre of the *templum*, facing the initial direction. He washes his hands with lustral water, but pouring it outward to "dissolve" the purity. He offers an inverse libation of wine and spelt to the deities, pouring it outside the boundary, pronouncing a formula of revocation: "**Dique Deaeque omnes, quod vobis effavi, nunc dissolvo et profano reddo. Favorem vestrum revoco, ut hoc templum annullatum sit**" that is "Gods and Goddesses all, what I have effated to you, now I dissolve it and return it to the profane. I revoke your favour, so that this *templum* may be annulled" (deduced from *De Lingua Latina* VI, 53-54 where the *effatio* consecrates, therefore the inverse revokes). Assistants remove sacred objects (e.g. temporary altar), preparing for the inversion.

2. **Dissolution of the Templum in the sky**: the officiant, with the *lituus*, raises his gaze to the sky and annuls the mental axes in inverse order. He starts from the *cardo* (north-south), tracing the *lituus* from south to north, then annuls the *decumanus* (west-east, starting from the inauspicious west). Moving the *lituus* in an inverse arc, thus dissolving the division of the four regions. He effas the annulment with a formula: "**Hoc caelum in regiones divisi, nunc revoco et effationem solvo, ut non sit amplius templum**" that is "I have divided this sky into regions, now I revoke it and dissolve the verbal consecration, so that it may no longer be a *templum*".

3. **Annulment of the physical boundaries**: to dissolve a perimeter traced with ropes the formula will be "**Sicut hunc locum auspicato finivi, ita nunc auspicio solvo; sicut finibus circumdedi, ita nunc finibus eximo; ut mos Etruscus erat, ordine verso**" that is "Just as I delimited this place with auspices, so now with auspices I dissolve it; as with boundaries I surrounded it, so now from boundaries I free it; as was Etruscan custom, following the inverse order". Then, starting always from the **east**, he physically traverses the perimeter, but in **clockwise** sense, unlike the foundation tracing, removing the rope as he proceeds.

4. **Removal of the liminal signs**: the assistants remove liminal stakes or stones in the inverse order to how they were positioned, retracing the action backwards. The officiant verifies with the *lituus*, annulling the boundaries. The brazier is dismantled, overturning the materials outside to desecrate.

5. **Observation of any omens and conclusion of the annulment**: at this point the officiant could observe further omens to confirm that the execution has been pleasing, scanning the sky awaiting the response. If confirmed, he concludes with a closing formula: "**Templum dissolutum est**" that is "The *templum* is dissolved". The assistants remove all objects, leaving the space profane.

## Analogies with other cultures

1. **Ancient Greece**

- **Attested facts**:
    - The Greeks traced a sacred area for temporary altars, using stones, fences or strings to delimit the space, with preliminary offerings to Zeus or Apollo. The *temenos* was often rectangular, similar to the Roman *templum*.

**Deduction**: delimitation with ropes and orientation to the east (propitious part, while the west was considered the entrance of the *Inferi*) recall the Etruscan-Roman *templum*. However, the Greeks did not use a physical furrow nor a division into four regions, but the concept of sacred separation is analogous.

2. **Vedic India**

- **Attested facts**:

    - The sacred spaces for Vedic sacrifice (*Shrauta Yajnas*) are delimited with lines traced by priests (*hotri*) using powder or ropes, oriented to the east for the rising of the Sun. The ground is purified with milk and fire.

**Deduction**: orientation to the east and quadrangular shape recall the Roman *templum*. Verbal consecration (*mantra*) is analogous to *effatio*, and the central ara can be compared to the Vedic altar.

3. **Shinto Japan**

- **Attested facts**:

    - The *himorogi* (divine enclosure) are temporary ritual areas, their perimeter function is intrinsic to their meaning: they serve to create a consecrated enclosure, a *kekkai*, that is a spiritual barrier that separates the sacred from the profane. In their centre a provisional altar is installed that serves to host images and ritual objects, which could recall a *tabernaculum*, the tent/hut that some Roman sources say was placed inside the *templum*.

**Deduction**: quadrangular shape, usually oriented to the east or north-east (considered propitious for its connection with light), delimited by four poles joined by a sacred rope, its parallelism with the Etruscan *templum*, as well as the Greek *temenos* and the Indian *mahāvedi*, is absolutely surprising, and confirms the existence of a universal practice of delimiting ritual zones with analogous characteristics and functions.

# Orientation to the East of the Officiant

## Motivation in the Roman context (Etruscan origin)

1. **Etruscan heritage**

    - The practice of orienting oneself to the east in Roman rites is a direct legacy of **Etruscan discipline**, the complex of sacred rules codified in the *Libri rituales* and *Libri augurales*.
    - The Etruscans, when delimiting a *templum*, traced the cardinal axes and then divided the sky into 16 parts (the Romans into 4, as explained by Pliny in *Naturalis Historia* II, 142-144 and Cicero in *De Divinatione* II, 42), probably looking north (the north is the home of Tinia; lightning from the north-east had greater positive value, while that from the south had lesser value). Whatever the observation point, the ***pars familiaris*** (benevolent) was still to the east. Etruscan temples faced east.
    - This cosmological classification was transmitted in full to Rome: Roman augurs maintained the same orientation and the same division of the sky, even if the observer looked south, as attested by the sources [personal hypothesis: the observation point changed when the Capitoline became the central hill, and the augur looked toward the Forum and the rest of the city, which lay to the south].

2. **Solar and cosmic symbolism**

    - For Etruscans and Romans, the east (*oriens*) was the seat of the rising Sun and the point from which divine light arrived. The rising of the Sun represented the vital principle, rebirth and cosmic order.
    - Ritual orientation to the east was therefore an act of opening toward celestial benevolence and an invocation of fortune and *salus* for the community.

3. **Augural and ritual function**

    - In Roman public rites, the orientation of the officiant determined not only the placement of the altar and sacred objects, but also the interpretation of signs (*auspicia*).
    - A sign observed from the east was considered auspicious, in perfect continuity with the Etruscan model.
    - Orientation thus guaranteed that propitious forces were received "frontally" during the rite.

4. **Exceptions**

    - In cults of chthonic deities, Saturn, or foreign numina, a different orientation could be adopted, often toward the west, zones associated with the Underworld or distant worlds.
    - Even among the Etruscans, rites dedicated to infernal deities did not always follow orientation toward the east.

## Analogues in other cultures on ritual orientation

1. **Vedic (ancient India)**

    - In *śrauta yajña*, the sacrificer orients himself to the east to address Sūrya and the celestial Gods; the fire altar is built so as to receive the light of dawn. Analogous exceptions exist for chthonic or nocturnal deities.

2. **Shinto (Japan)**

    - Many main shrines are aligned with the rising Sun, especially those dedicated to *Amaterasu Ōmikami*. The priest, during certain rites, orients himself to the east, analogously to what happens in Roman/Etruscan temples facing the rising Sun.

3. **Chinese (imperial and Taoist tradition)**

    - Although often sacrificing facing south, the east is associated with spring and nascent life. In agricultural and Taoist temples, some altars are arranged to the east to

welcome the energy of dawn (*yang qi*), a concept akin to the propitious light of the Etruscans.

4. **Ancient Greeks**

    - The entrances of many Greek temples were oriented east, so that the statue of the deity received the first light of day. In open-air ceremonies, the celebrant looked toward the rising Sun, as occurred in Etruscan and Roman rites.

## Operational conclusion for the reconstructed rite

- **General rule**: officiant facing east (*oriens*) according to the Etruscan classification of the *pars bona caeli*; head veiled; altar placed in a position consistent with the orientation of the *templum*.
- **Origin**: direct derivation from Etruscan discipline, which defined the east as the propitious side and receptive to luminous divine forces.
- **Exceptions**: chthonic deities, Saturn, Honor, foreign cults → variable orientation (often west), head uncovered; logic consistent with the Etruscan ritual model.
- **Universal reason**: orientation toward the east as opening to the vital and benevolent principle is a trait shared by many cultures, but in Rome it was filtered and regulated by Etruscan tradition, which fixed its technical codification.

# Templum and Etruscan cosmology

We know (from Pliny and Cicero) that the Etruscans divided the sky into 4 regions according to the cardinal points, and each of them was divided into another 4 parts, for a total of 16; thanks to the Piacenza liver (a divinatory artefact of the 2nd century BCE) we know to which deity each single section was destined. We thus have the quadrant from **east** to **north** dedicated to the **superior** deities (Jupiter and Juno) and the quadrant from **north** to **west** to the **infernal** deities (Vertumnus and Saturn). In the **southern** semicircle are placed the deities of the **soil** and **nature** (Silvanus, Liber Pater, Tellus). Does this remind you of anything?

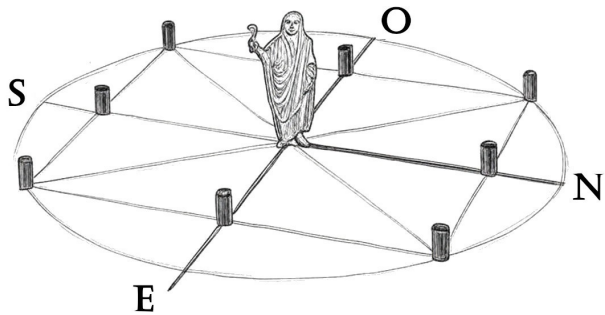
Imagine a sphere: the northern hemisphere represents the **celestial vault**, the southern one the **Earth**. The main axis, the one running from east to west, is the **horizon**. The east-north quadrant is where the Sun **rises**, which is why it is the home of the superior Gods, while the north-west one is the region where the star begins its **descent**, so this is where the infernal Gods are placed. The division of space represents the **cosmos** as understood by ancient civilizations: below is the earthly plane, above the celestial dome; if you look north you face the **sky**, where we find a pantheon divided according to the solar path (ascending-superior, descending-infernal); if you look south you face our **planet**, with its fauna and flora.

We have no direct Etruscan sources that specify in which direction they turned their gaze, but it is precisely this cosmology that led me to the conclusion that, unlike the Romans, the Etruscans looked north, keeping the propitious east to the **right** and the inauspicious west to the **left**. It would have made no sense to look south, turning one's back on the north-east, the region of the Olympian deities, the home of Tinia, supreme God, father of auspices. I have already explained that, in my opinion, the Romans initially followed the same orientation, keeping the inauspicious part to the left (which is why in Latin the term *sinister* continued to indicate something threatening and terrifying) and that only later they began to look south, when the Capitoline became the religious and political centre, moving the Seven Hills around it (in archaic times they

were different, as the *Septimontium* rite reminds us), and the bulk of the city developed to the south (to the north there were only the meadows of the Campus Martius), so the Roman augur looked toward Rome. It should also be said that the division of the sky according to the Romans was much rougher; Cicero tells us that for them 4 parts were sufficient (*De Divinatione* II, 42), which means they shared the idea of space (east-propitious, west-inauspicious) but not the complete cosmology, that is they did not link the regions to the deities as the Etruscans did, so they did not think of turning their backs on Jupiter while looking south.

In the rite above, where I reconstruct the tracing of the *templum*, I said to direct the offering looking south, because this is what is documented by Roman sources (Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* I, 18), but I am of the opinion that it is perfectly fine also to face north, if one wants to recover coherence with Etruscan cosmology and a more archaic spirituality, even if such direction is not documented. This is not an interpretation, but it is how the Etruscans actually divided space, attributing each zone to precise deities, so the orientation should take this into account, evaluating also specific cases (e.g. to which deity the rite is dedicated).

The *templum*, therefore, is not a simple observatory but represents the **Universe** itself, or at least the concept that the Ancients had of it, a **portal** to tune in with the deities and align with **cosmic forces**; by tracing this space the augur becomes co-creator of the sacred, as transmitted by **Tages**, the prophet who emerged from the earth to teach men to look at the sky.



# Ablutions and Lustrations: the purification of spaces

**The ancient sources speak explicitly of cleansing actions before rites, often with water poured over the officiant's hands from a jug, to symbolise the removal of impurities (*miasma*). Here are the key references:**

- **Cato, *De Agri Cultura* 128**: the officiant washes his hands (*manus interluito*) before reciting a prayer. Reliefs and coins show the liturgical use of water jugs, emphasising the purity required before every sacred act.
- **Ovid, *Fasti* V, 435**: "*cumque manus puras fontana perluit unda*" confirming the importance of washing the hands before performing the rite.
- **Relief of the Sacrifice of Domitius Ahenobarbus (2nd century BCE, Louvre)**: this relief depicts a priest washing his hands in a basin (*simpulum*) while an assistant pours water from a flask, indicating the use of running water for ritual purification.
- **Ara Pacis Augustae (1st century BCE, Rome)**: on the southern frieze, the reliefs show priestly figures (probably *Flamines* or Arval Brothers) with containers pouring water or liquids onto altars or their own hands. These containers, similar to jugs (*urceus*), suggest a ritual of purification with water before sacrifices.
- **Aspergilla**: liturgical instruments ranging from olive branches to precious artefacts, used to sprinkle lustral water during rites of purification, such as the lustrations of temples, altars, military equipment or persons.

These practices were not only hygienic but symbolic: the washing represented the elimination of spiritual contaminations, essential before every ritual activity.

## Analogues from other cultures

- **Shinto (Japan)**: before rites, *misogi* or *temizu* is performed, a washing of hands and mouth with water from a fountain or jug, to purify oneself spiritually. Analogy: similar to the Roman washing of hands before covering the head (*Acta Fratrum Arvalium*), emphasising purity to access the sacred.
- **Vedic rites (ancient India)**: in the *Yajurveda*, the officiant washes hands and face with water from a jug (*kalasha*) before sacrifices, reciting *mantra* to remove impurities (*doṣa*). Analogy: parallel to Cato's washing before sacrificial prayers, with water symbolising renewal.
- **Greek rites**: in the Eleusinian Mysteries, water from a jug was used for hand ablutions before rites, as described by Plutarch (*Moralia*). Analogy: similar to Roman purification before altars (Ovid), to prepare the body for the divine.

**Personal purification of the officiant**: wash the hands with lustral water from a jug, whispering: "***aqua fluens sordes abluat, labes eximat***" (may flowing water wash away impurities, remove stains). Then, with cupped hands, pour water on the face, concluding: "***purus sum, puriter accedo***" (I am pure, I approach in purity). Analogies: Shinto *temizu* (informal prayer), Hindu *ācamana*. It removes impurities and prepares for the rite with the necessary purity.

## 1. Preliminary purification (lustration)

- **Roman sources**: *lustratio* was a well-attested practice, used for people, objects and places. It could be done with lustral water (*aqua lustralis*) prepared with water and salt, or with fumigations of incense and other herbs.

- **Function**: to remove impurities and create a sacred space separated from the profane.

- **Intercultural analogues**:
    - In Vedic rituals the area is sprinkled with water from the sacred river.
    - In Shinto *harae* is performed with wands and paper (*ōnusa* or *harai-gushi*).
    - In Buddhism and China incense is burned to purify the air and invite benevolent spirits.

## 2. Sound signalling

- **Roman sources**: Ovid (*Fasti* V, 441-442) narrates that the sound of bronzes drove away the Lemures during the Lemuria:

  "*Ferie Lemuria*: *they are driven away with the sound of bronzes and with black beans the Manes, after the father has made the sign nine times.*"

  This confirms that metallic sound had an apotropaic function.

- **Possible instruments**: bronze plates, bells, *tintinnabula*, *sistrum*.

- **Intercultural analogues**:
    - *Suzu* and *kagura suzu* in Shinto to summon the *Kami* and purify.
    - Tibetan bells or Chinese plates (*bo*, *tingsha*).
    - Gongs and rattles in African cultures to drive away evil spirits.

## 3. Introductory offerings

- **Roman sources**: in some private rites, before the main invocations, grains of incense, wine or cakes (*mola salsa*) were offered to minor Gods or local powers. Virgil (*Aeneid* VI, 243-254) describes Aeneas performing preliminary offerings and sacrifices to chthonic deities before descending to the Underworld.
- **Function**: to "open" symbolically the channel of communication, predisposing the place and the officiants.

# 4. Physical preparation of the space

- **Roman sources**: the authors we have seen have shared similar descriptions for the delimitation of a ritual *templum* (not a building, but a sacred space traced by the priest), both in the sky and on the ground, according to codified norms of Etruscan root. This could occur with formulas, gestures, invisible or visible signs (chalk, ropes, stakes, furrows).
- **Intercultural analogues:**
    - Brahmins trace the *vedi* (sacred area) with coloured powders.
    - Taoists create a perimeter with talismans and water.
    - Shamans use stones or staffs to delimit the space.

These elements – purification, sound, preliminary offerings, delimitation – can be inserted **before** the invocation to Janus, thus creating a "phase zero" that is consistent with documented Roman practice and with a universal religious feeling.

**Note on the place of the Lares and the Genius**: after the invocation to Janus, opener of every divine access, the Lares and the Genius of the place are honoured. This placement is consistent with the role they had in Roman cult as guarantors of the house, the family and the sacred space, and finds correspondence in many archaic traditions of different peoples. In Vedic sacrifices of ancient India, before the main deity gifts are offered to the guardian spirits of the directions and to Agni, sacred fire mediator; in Japanese Shinto the local *Kami* (*Ujigami*) is greeted before the main *Kami*; in Chinese popular religion offerings are made to the earth god (*Tudi Gong*) as mediator of the place; in ancient Greece libations and offerings were addressed first to local heroes and the *agathos daimon*.

In all these cultures the gesture has the same meaning: to ask the favour of the guardians and purifiers of the ritual space, so that the prayer to the main deity may be received without obstacles.

# *Favete linguis* — ritual silence and protection of the sacred word

## Origin and meaning

- **Etymology**: *favere* (to favour, to propitiate) + *lingua* → "propitiate with the tongue", that is **do not pronounce inauspicious words**, maintain a silence that protects the rite.
- It is an **apotropaic formula**: in a sacral context, every word has power, and a casual or negative phrase could "contaminate" the sacrifice or the omen.

## Etruscan tradition and transmission to the Romans

- In **Etruscan discipline**, during the *libatio* or augural observation, the sacred operator (often a *haruspex* or augur) required absolute silence.
- Silence (*silentium*) was not absence of sound, but **absence of profane word**: ritual instruments (*flutes*, *tibiae*) could sound to mask noises and prevent inauspicious words from arriving.
- This principle is attested indirectly by Roman sources that describe rites of Etruscan origin, such as those for the *conditio urbis* or the opening of an augural *templum*.

## Main Latin sources

1. **Ovid**, *Fasti* I, 71-72
   *Linguis animisque favete: primum carmine adest*.
   → invitation to silence to protect the sacred value of poetic word in a religious context.
2. **Virgil**, *Aeneid* V, 71
   *Favete omnes, ore favete*.
   → solemn call during a funeral ceremony, to underline the sacredness of the act.

3. **Cicero**, *De Divinatione* I, 102; II, 71; II, 83

   Confirms the technical use of the formula in the sacred sphere and its function of protecting the rite.

## Analogues in other cultures

- **Ancient Greece**: in the *Eleusinia* and in many public rites, the herald cried **εὐφημεῖτε** ("speak well" or "maintain auspicious words"), with identical apotropaic purpose.
- **Pharaonic Egypt**: in temple rituals, priests pronounced formulas of "closing" of profane word before invocations.
- **Vedic India**: during the sacrifice (*yajña*), the brahmins required *mā tū vada* ("do not speak"), to avoid phonetic errors or profane intrusions, since every wrong word imposed repetition of the rite.
- **Japanese Shinto**: in purifications (*harae*), the chief officiant maintains sacred silence while ritual sounds (bells *suzu* or *shaku* sticks) create a "sound barrier" against impurities.

## Application in the Roman rite

- The **commanded silence** was pronounced **before the invocation or the libation**.
- It can be accompanied by a gesture: raised hand or augural staff (*lituus*), symbol of interruption of profane word.
- In Roman public rites of probable Etruscan matrix, silence was reinforced by the sound of *tibiae*, which prevented accidental noises from interfering.

# Technical note: use of the formula *Favete linguis*

**Origin**: attested in Cicero (*De Divinatione* I, 102) and Ovid (*Fasti* I, 71), inherited from Etruscan rituals. In literal Latin it means "propitiate with the tongue", that is do not pronounce inauspicious words and maintain sacred silence.

**Function**:

- To establish ritual **silentium**, fundamental so that the rite is not "polluted" by sounds or words out of place.
- To signal the actual beginning of communication with the divine.
- To allow the officiant to obtain the attention and concentration of those present.

**When it is used**:

- Immediately before the beginning of the main invocations, after lighting the fire on the altar.
- It can be repeated in case of interruptions or unexpected noises.

**How to pronounce it**:

1. The officiant stands facing east, feet together, arms at sides.
2. Raises the right hand with palm open toward those present (or the *lituus* if in augural vestment).
3. Pronounces clearly, with firm but not aggressive tone:
   **"*Favete linguis*!"**
4. Waits a few seconds of total silence.
5. In public contexts, it can be followed by a sign to the *tibicines* (flute players) to maintain a continuous musical background (*tibiae pares*) that covers accidental noises, according to Roman custom.

**Analogues in other cultures:**

- In Vedic rites silence (*mauna*) is imposed before the recitation of the *mantra*.

- In Greek rituals the command **εὐφημεῖτε** ("speak auspicious words") is used.
- In certain Etruscan ceremonies the augur ordered silence with a gesture and ritual words before delimiting the *templum*.

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# Central offerings of the rite:

# *Sacrificium Deorum (sine sanguine)*

This is the true sacrifice, the central act of the rite, where the deity to whom the festival is dedicated is invoked. The **double offering** is confirmed by multiple sources (Cato *De Agri Cultura* 134 and then 141, and again in Ovid *Fasti* V, 441-444), so we can state with certainty that toward the deities (or spirits, as in the case of the Lemures) recipients of the rite the offerings and prayers are always double: a **first** offering in which the *Numen* is invoked and blessings or mercy are requested, and a **second** prayer in which what has been said is confirmed and increased. The pattern is simple, makes sense from a Roman ritual point of view and is exactly as documented by the Ancients themselves. However, even the simplest things are often misunderstood. In most reconstructed rites this central part is divided into *Precatio* and *Oblatio*, where the first is the invocation of the deity through incense, and the second has been elevated to the main offering, but in reality it is simply wine. One does not need Cato to understand the senselessness of this choice: why light incense as the first offering if incense to purify and attract the attention of the deities has already been lit with Janus? Do we want to remove from Janus his function of **opening** the rite? The sources describe the first offering as the most substantial and rich (Cato names the *strue*, a layered cake, and the *ferctum*, a stuffed bread); why eliminate these substantial gifts to replace them with incense? If you are asking for blessing for your house and your family, or even health and prosperity for the community, I think you should have the good sense to offer something a little more important.

Offering incense first and then a cup of wine is fine as purification, not as the main offering to the one to whom the entire ceremony is dedicated. This arrangement not only lacks source support but also lacks logic. Adhering to what is documented while keeping the order with the cake (symbol of the earth) as the first offering, and adding wine, milk, fruit or salted flour (nutritive or consecrating elements) as the second offering, follows a **natural logic**: you give the best of the earth – or the richest thing you have – then you consecrate it with a fluid.

The way in which, in this reconstructed rite, I have divided the ***Sacrificium*** conforms to the sources, and I too, for practical reasons, have given names to the two phases: ***Datio*** and ***Auctio***. I proposed these names because they are more archaic in character and better describe the act: in the *Datio* the **main gift** is offered and you "deliver" your requests to the deity, and with the *Auctio* (from *augeo*, to increase) you **augment** (*mactatio*) and **consecrate** the action. The names usually proposed, *Precatio* and *Oblatio*, not only do not describe the act (the first part is not a simple prayer, but an offering, indeed it should be the most important offering) but have a clear Christian influence (*Oblatio* is a late Latin term used in ecclesiastical liturgy), and are part of those names that are often used in reconstructed rites but prove **improper** and with influences that are better avoided. For this same reason I have ignored other analogous formulas, such as "*ita est*", used a lot in reconstructed ceremonies but which finds no correspondence in Roman ritual practice, and is a clear imitation of the formula "*ite missa est*" with which Christian masses are closed. It is not necessary, the *sigillum* is already the closure. And shall we talk about "*ita vultis ita est*", which recalls the "*Deus vult*" shouted by the Crusaders? I would therefore say to avoid these conditioned interpretations and stick to the **documented** sources for the base, and where source support is lacking adopt those intercultural analogies that present a high level of **compatibility** with Roman spirituality and ritual practice, where what is added still finds documented correspondence (as done with cloths to delimit sacred areas, bells and apotropaic sounds or with collective actions); every integration must have **coherence** with the Etruscan-Roman religious and cultural context.

# Clapping hands (3 or 9 times)

**Roman sources:**

- In the Lemuria rite, the *paterfamilias* performs repeated gestures in a fixed number (nine times he throws black beans, nine times he pronounces the formula, Ovid *Fasti* V, 441-492).
- Three and its multiples (9, 27) are frequent in Roman and pagan symbolism: a perfect number, linked to ritual completeness.
- Clapping hands itself is not attested as a Roman ritual formula, but the gesture of "striking" (hands or instruments) to mark a passage is known in theatrical and military contexts.

**Reconstructed symbolic function**: to mark the passage from the central part of the rite to the closure, uniting officiants and bystanders in a single choral act.

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# Formula "*Bona fortuna sit!*"

- **Absence in liturgical sources**: we do not find in Roman texts an identical choral formula, but we do find public and private auguries with analogous constructions (*bene vertat*, *feliciter sit*, etc.).
- **Coherence with the Roman spirit**: auspices, congratulations and collective blessings were common at festivals, weddings, triumphs. The formula fits into this tradition, adapted in a simple and direct form.

## Intercultural analogies

Many religions and ritual traditions include **collective gestures and sounds** to:

1. **Seal a moment** (phase transition).
2. **Channel common energy toward the purpose of the rite**.
3. **Unite the group and officiants in a single choral action**.

Examples:

- **Shinto**: in sanctuary ceremonies hands are clapped twice (*kashiwade*) to greet the *Kami* and attract their attention, followed by a final bow.
- **Tibetan Buddhism**: clapping in monastic debates and in some tantric practices to "seal" the recitation of *mantra*.
- **African and American rituals**: rhythmic clapping and foot-stamping to "root" the community and invoke protection.
- **Ancient Greek world**: in certain mystery and Dionysian ceremonies, the public clapped hands or instruments to mark the transition and participate actively.

**Note:**

This phase, although not attested in surviving Roman ritual practice, is reconstructed on the basis of intercultural analogies and the Roman communal attitude. The number of claps and the collective formula are consistent with Roman auspicial symbolism and practice, while remaining a reconstruction proposal.

# *Piaculum* – reparatory offering

**Definition:**

In Roman religion the *piaculum* was a sacrificial offering **made to placate** a deity when it was believed that the rite might have broken some sacred norm (*ius divinum*) or been performed imperfectly.

It is not a "devotional" sacrifice but one of **expiation or apology**: the formula is not *do ut des* ("I give so that you may give") but *si quid tibi contra ritum factum est, hoc piaculum sit* ("if something has been done against the rite, may this be the reparation").

**Sources:**

- Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II, 8-9: recounts disasters and punishments in case of ritual fault or negligence toward the deities and omens.
- Cato, *De Agri Cultura* 141: describes in detail expiatory formulas in case of possible errors or unwelcome offerings.
- Macrobius, *Saturnalia* III, 10.7: specifies that the *piaculum* could be foreseen **before** an extraordinary rite, or **after** a detected error.

**Placement in the reconstructed rite:**

1. **Before** the *sigillum*, so as to reach the end without the shadow of error, since the ritual closure that – precisely – seals the rite is the act that confirms the *Pax Deorum*.
2. If an error is detected, the *piaculum* is performed immediately on the still-lit brazier, without resuming the entire rite.
3. Only after the *piaculum* do we move on to individual offerings and the festive part.
4. If the rite has been performed correctly the *piaculum* can theoretically be omitted, but there can always be unnoticed errors, lost accents or escaped external noises, so it is good practice to always offer a *piaculum* to expiate "any oversights".

**Execution:**

- Pure incense or a small libation of wine/milk/honey is offered, accompanied by the reparatory formula, e.g.
  **Si quid in hoc ritu contra ritum factum est, hoc piaculum esto**.
- Sober gesture, without music or applause, to mark the penitential character.

**Analogues in other cultures:**

- **Veda** (ancient India): in *śrauta* sacrifices, every error of pronunciation or gesture required a reparatory offering (*prāyaścitta*), on pain of invalidating the rite.
- **Shinto** (Japan): if a *norito* is recited badly, an additional offering can be made to "purify the error" (reparatory *osonae*).
- **Traditional Chinese religion**: in ancestor worship, if a passage is inverted or forgotten, a small supplementary offering is added accompanied by a bow of apology.
- **Pre-Roman Mediterranean religions** (Etruscans, Greeks): expiatory sacrifices were provided if a rite was disturbed by bad omens or accidents.

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# Final phase

## 1. Verification of correct execution

**Ancient Rome**:

- The concept of *piaculum* (reparatory act) provided that formal or pronunciation errors could compromise the efficacy of the rite and oblige it to be repeated from the beginning.
- Sources: Cato, *De Agri Cultura* 141. Livy, Virgil and Horace cite *piacula* in cases of profanation.
- Correct *pronuntiatio* and precise gestuality were considered essential: it was not a question of "symbolism" but of concrete efficacy of the sacred act.

**Analogies**:

- **Vedic rites**: an error in the recitation of *mantra* compromises the sacrifice (*yajña*) and requires repetition. The *śruti* must be pronounced exactly as transmitted.
- **Shinto**: the *norito* must be recited in correct form, on pain of loss of efficacy; any errors require immediate correction.
- **Ancient Egypt**: ritual texts (*peret em heru*, "going forth by day") had to be pronounced perfectly, often with the support of specialised readers.

**Note:** before the *sigillum*, the officiant (and assistants) mentally verifies the correctness of every gesture and word, since ritual errors may require reformulation or repetition of the entire rite.

## 2. Individual offerings on the still-lit brazier

**Reconstructive proposal**:

- Each bystander, individually, may place incense, aromatic herbs or small dry offerings on the still-smoking brazier.
- This individual gesture allows each person to "seal" their personal bond with the deity, while maintaining the sacred atmosphere.

**Analogies**:

- **Shinto**: at the end of the ceremony, the faithful may offer *sakaki* branches or throw coins and prayers into the *saisen-bako*, approaching the altar.
- **Buddhism**: individual lighting of incense sticks after the formal ceremony.
- **Domestic Greek-Roman cult**: additional offerings (*libamina*) after the main sacrifice, especially incense and wine.

- **Ancient Judaism**: offerings of spices and incense in the Temple in non-central moments of the sacrifice.

## 3. Transition to the festive moment

**Ancient Rome**:

- The religious festival (*feriae*) often culminated in a collective banquet (*epulum*, *convivium*), where the sacrificed or prepared food for the occasion was shared.
- The act of eating together consolidated social bonds and "concluded" the sacred phase by transforming it into concrete community.

**Analogies**:

- **Greeks**: public banquet after sacrifices (*theoxenia* and Spartan *syssitia*).
- **Vedic rites**: collective consumption of offerings of milk, butter and cereals cooked on the sacred fire.
- **Shinto**: distribution of *naorai* (blessed food) after the ceremony.
- **Early Christianity**: fraternal *agape* as community banquets after the liturgy.
- **Native Americans**: dances and community meals after the sacred part of the *powwow*.

**Note:** the transition to the convivial moment occurs only after the effective closure of the rite and any personal offering by the bystanders. This passage too is sacralised by sharing, consistent with Roman tradition and with analogues found in many other cultures.

## Summary of intercultural analogies:

**Vedic tradition (ancient India)**

- In Vedic sacrifices (*yajña*), before invoking the main deity offerings are made to the **guardian spirits of the directions** (*dikpala*) and to the **ancestors** (*piṭṛs*), as well as to **Agni** (the sacred fire) who "opens" the passage to the Gods.
- The idea is to honour the local and cosmic presences that guarantee order (*Ṛta*), very similar to the concept of *Pax Deorum*.

**Shinto (Japan)**

- In a Shinto rite, before addressing the main deity (*Kami*) of the sanctuary, the priest purifies himself (*harae*) and performs a small greeting to the **local Kami** (*Ujigami*) or other local guardian spirits.
- This ensures that the sanctuary and ritual space are "open" and propitious.

**Chinese tradition (Confucianism/Taoism/Popular Religion)**

- In traditional rites incense and prostrations are offered to the local **Shen**, often to the "earth god" (*Tudi Gong*), before any important prayer.
- This passage is mandatory in family or seasonal ceremonies, because the god of the place is considered mediator with the rest of the pantheon.

**Ancient Greece**

- Before sacrifices or sacred banquets, it was common to offer libations to **local heroes** and the **agathos daimon** ("good spirit" of the house or place) before addressing the main deity.
- This logic is very close to the Roman Lares.

In summary: almost everywhere the logical passage is

1. **Purification** (lustrations, apotropaic sounds, preliminary offerings)
2. **Opening access** (often with a “portal” deity, such as Janus or Agni)
3. **Honouring the guardians of the place** (Lares, Ancestors, *Genius loci*, *Tudi Gong*, *Ujigami*, etc.)
4. **Invoking the main deity** (requests for blessings, offering of the richest gifts)
5. **Conclusion and verification** (*sigillum ritus*, *piaculum*)
6. **Convivial events** (music, dances, banquet)

# Carmina: the sung prayers

The *Carmina* were an ancient form of songs or hymns, often with sacred or ritual connotations, typically composed in archaic Latin and could be recited in formal contexts such as religious rites or in more convivial occasions, such as banquets (the so-called *Carmina Convivalia*). Ancient authors like Cicero, Varro and Cato speak of them as examples of a primitive oral tradition, but what has come down to us is limited: no complete texts have survived directly, only fragments cited in later works or inscriptions. These fragments, though limited, show some common characteristics in terms of **tone**, **rhythm** and **verse structure**, which reflect their ritual function and oral tradition. Below, I analyse the shared elements, based on the available sources and modern studies:

## 1. Tone

The tone of the *Carmina* is generally:

- **Solemn and sacral**: the *Carmina Sacra*, such as the **Carmen Arvale** and fragments of the **Carmina Saliaria**, have a ritual and invocatory tone, aimed at establishing contact with the deities to propitiate protection, fertility or purification. For example, in the *Carmen Arvale*, phrases like "*enos Lases iuvate*" (help us, O Lares) or "*neve lu rue Marmar sins incurrere in pleores*" (do not let evil strike the fields) express a supplicatory and formal tone, typical of Roman prayers that seek the *Pax Deorum*.
- **Archaic and obscure**: even for Romans of later eras the language of the *Carmina* was already archaic and difficult to understand, as Varro notes in *De Lingua Latina* regarding the *Carmina Saliaria*. This arcane tone confers an aura of mystery and sacrality, reinforced by obsolete terms or ritual formulas no longer in common use.
- **Repetitive and emphatic**: repetition is a common trait, such as "*triumpe*" repeated five times in the *Carmen Arvale*, which acts as

a ritual cry, or the use of alliterations and assonances in the Salii fragments (e.g. "*cozeulodorieso*"). This emphatic tone served to strengthen the mnemonic and ritual impact, typical of oral tradition.

## 2. Rhythm

The rhythm of the *Carmina* is closely linked to their performative context (songs accompanied by dances or ritual gestures) and to the archaic metre used:

- **Saturnian metre**: this is the predominant metre in *Carmina Sacra*, considered the oldest poetic verse in Latin literature. It is characterised by a flexible structure, often based on two *cola* (rhythmic segments) separated by a caesura, with an accentual rather than quantitative rhythm (unlike subsequent classical poetry, influenced by the Greeks). Examples:
    - In the *Carmen Arvale*: "*enos Lases iuvate*" follows a rhythm suitable for sung recitation, with strong accents and marked pauses.
    - In the *Carmina Saliaria*, fragments like "*divum deo supplicamus*" (cited by Varro) show a similar rhythm, with a cadence that favours memorisation and ritual scansion.
- **Adaptation to performance**: the rhythm was functional to the context. The Salii, for example, performed armed dances (*tripudium*), and the rhythm of the *Carmina* had to synchronise with the movements. The *Carmen Arvale*, recited during an agrarian rite, had a repetitive rhythm that probably accompanied ceremonial gestures.
- **Alliteration and assonance**: both *Carmina Sacra* show a marked use of alliterations (e.g. "*limen sali, sta berber*" in the *Carmina Saliaria*) and phonic repetitions, which create a rhythmic and musical effect, essential for oral transmission and ritual impact.

## 3. Verse structure

The surviving fragments show some common characteristics in the verses:

- **Brevity and modularity**: the verses of the *Carmina Sacra* are short and structured in autonomous units, often organised in pairs or repeated groups. For example, the *Carmen Arvale* is composed of six lines, with short phrases like "*enos Lases iuvate*" repeated three times, followed by invocations to Mars and the cry "*triumpe*". This modular structure facilitated memorisation and collective recitation.
- **Ritual formulas**: the verses contain fixed formulas, typical of Roman religion, such as direct invocations to deities (e.g. "*Marmar*" for Mars in the *Carmen Arvale* or "*divum deo*" in the Salii). These formulas are synthetic and use archaic language, with verbal and lexical forms uncommon in classical Latin (e.g. "*enos*" for "*nos*").
- **Parallelism and repetition**: the verse structure is often parallel, with similar or identical phrases repeated for ritual emphasis. For example, in the *Carmen Arvale*, the triple repetition of "*enos Lases iuvate*" creates a litanic effect, also common in Salii fragments such as "*cume tonas, Leucesie*" (cited by Festus), where parallelism strengthens the rhythm.
- **Use of archaic Latin**: the verses are in primitive Latin, with archaic grammatical forms (e.g. "*sins*" for "*sinas*") and words that disappeared in classical Latin. This makes them difficult to interpret without the aid of glosses from authors like Varro or Festus.

## Common elements

In summary, the fragments of the *Carmina* share:

- A **solemn and ritual tone**, with emphasis on divine invocations and protection.

- A **rhythm based on Saturnian metre**, with alliterations and assonances that support oral and gestural performance.
- A **short and repetitive verse structure**, with fixed formulas and parallelisms that facilitate memorisation.

Although we do not have integral texts, but only fragments and quotations, common characteristics and recurring elements help us identify a standard structure with which to reconstruct a *Carmen*, aware that it is a proposed version, not original, but based on the recovery of those elements rooted in Roman tradition. The following work will be to create something **modern** without inventing, where the new is a need imposed by the lack of complete sources, but always in respect of what has been **handed down**. The main problem comes from the use of archaic Latin, of which we have only partial knowledge; however, classical Latin could be used, which allows us to construct meaningful sentences, substituting the names of the deities with arcane or Etruscan forms (example *Tinia* instead of *Iuppiter*), to confer that primigenial aura typical of the *Carmina*.

## Example of reconstruction

Here is the proposal of a *Carmen Sacrale* dedicated to the Etruscan-Roman Triad. I have used:

- **Classical Latin** for grammar and main phrases, making it comprehensible (e.g. imperatives and simple structures).
- **Etruscan/archaic names**: *Tinia* instead of Jupiter, *Uni* instead of Juno and *Menrva* for Minerva, to link it to a single ancestral tradition.
- **Traditional structure**: approximate Saturnian metre (verses divided into two *cola* with caesura "|", accentual rhythm), triple repetitions for ritual emphasis, alliterations (sounds in "t", "m", "s") and parallelisms.
- **Tone**: solemn and invocatory, similar to the Roman prayers handed down (e.g. in Ovid's *Fasti*).

# Carmen ad Triadem

Enos Tinia iuvato, | cailum regens fortis

Uni mater magna, | nostram familiam serva

Menrva virgo sapiens, | armis enos protege

Neve fulmen sins, | in populum enos currat

Tinia pater et Uni, | fruges conferte terris

Tinia rex et Menrva, | concordiam fovete nostris

Uni sancta et Menrva, | vim femineam donate

Triadem sakram iuvate, | Pactum Deorum servate

Omnes simul laudate, | Divos sakros invocate

Tinia Uni Menrva | enos, enos, iuvate

Triumpe, triumpe, triumpe

**English translation:**

Help us, O Tinia, | strong ruler of the sky

Uni, great mother, | protect our family

Menrva, wise virgin, | protect us with arms

Do not let the lightning | strike our people

Tinia father and Uni, | bring forth crops to the earth

Tinia king and Menrva, | foster concord among us

Uni holy and Menrva, | grant feminine power

Help us, sacred Triad, | preserve the Pact with the Gods

All together praise, | invoke the sacred Gods

Tinia Uni Menrva, | us, us, help us

Triumph, triumph, triumph (*sigillum* with apotropaic value, not military)

The text has been optimised to be sung and accompanied by percussion; the verses not only maintain the structure handed down by the sources but the alliterations (repetition of the same letters) and the uniformity of syllables (the initial lines 1-3 have 6+5, 6+6, 6+5 syllables, creating a regular cadence that increases to 7+6 toward the *triumpe*) which makes everything more rhythmic and musical.

## How to sing the Carmina

The surviving fragments, such as the *Carmen Arvale* and *Saliaria*, were performed by priestly colleges during religious ceremonies, where they were accompanied by dances or ritual movements. For example, the Salii performed the *tripudium*, an armed dance with sacred shields (*ancilia*), while reciting their *Carmina* in honour of Mars. Although we have no fragments of the *Carmina Convivalia*, Cicero (*Brutus* 75) and Cato (*Origines*, fr. 118) describe these songs as performed during banquets, often accompanied by flutes (*tibiae*), suggesting a musical dimension. The analogy with Greek symposiac songs, which were sung with lyre accompaniment, strengthens the idea of a melodic recitation. Therefore, we know for certain that the *Carmina*, both public sacral and private and convivial ones, were sung and in some cases accompanied by music. We know, through citations, works of art and finds, some musical instruments used at the time, but the lack of scores makes it impossible to reconstruct a complete melody. One could resort to hypothesis and experimental archaeology, but the rite requires certainties. So another way must be found, studying examples still accessible: singing in prayer is present also in Islam and in the liturgy of various Christian churches (e.g. Gregorian chants) but their origin goes back to the sung reading of psalms in Jewish worship, so I have deliberately ignored them to focus on analogies with other polytheistic and animistic religions around the world:

# 1. Analogy with Japanese sung prayers

The analogy with Japanese traditions is illuminating, since many ancient cultures use singing to amplify the spiritual power of prayers. In Shinto Japan, prayers (*norito*) are often sung or recited with a melodic intonation during rites, such as those in shrines dedicated to deities (*Kami*) like Amaterasu or Susanoo. The *norito* have characteristics similar to the *Carmina*:

- **Repetitions and rhythm**: *norito* use repetitive formulas and cadenced rhythms to invoke the *Kami*, creating a hypnotic and sacral effect, similar to Roman repetitions (e.g. "*triumpe*" or "*enos ... iuvate*").
- **Musical accompaniment**: often accompanied by instruments such as drums (*taiko*) or flutes (*fue*), *norito* are sung by priests (*kannushi*) in a solemn tone, which elevates the prayer to a performative act. This recalls the descriptions of *Carmina Convivalia* with flutes or the Salii rites with dances.
- **Ritual context:** like the *Carmina*, *norito* are part of structured ceremonies, with codified movements and gestures, to propitiate protection, fertility or divine harmony, parallel to Roman *Pax Deorum*.

# 2. Vedic hymns in Hinduism

In the ancient Vedic Indian tradition the hymns of the *Rigveda* – a corpus of over 1,000 metrical compositions – were sung during sacrificial rites (*yajña*) to invoke deities such as Indra (God of thunder), Agni (fire) or Varuna (cosmic waters). These hymns, known as *sukta*, incorporated rhythmic metre (such as *gāyatrī*), repetitions and alliterations, similar to the Saturnian of the *Carmina*, and were performed by priests (*hotṛ*) with precise melodic intonations, often accompanied by instruments like the *veena* (string instrument similar to the *lituus*). The singing served to propitiate natural forces (e.g. rivers and mountains as living spirits) and to maintain cosmic order (*Ṛta*). Today, in surviving Hindu rites, such as *pūjā*, the hymns are still sung, but in more ritualised forms. This parallel with the *Carmina* is evident in the oral and mnemonic function: both were

transmitted verbally for centuries before being written, emphasising the acoustic impact to connect with the divine.

## 3. Shamanic songs in African indigenous traditions

In traditional Yoruba religions (West Africa, e.g. Nigeria and Benin), the *oriki* – sung praise hymns – invoke *orisha* (deities/spirits) such as Ogun (war) or Yemoja (mother of waters). These songs, with percussive rhythm and repetitions, are performed during rites such as the *Osun-Osogbo* festival, accompanied by drums (*bata*) and dances, to propitiate spirits of rivers, trees and ancestors. Similar to *Carmina* they serve to maintain cosmic harmony (*Ase*) and are transmitted orally. Comparison: both incorporate song and dance as a means to alter reality (e.g. healing or fertility). Other African traditions, such as Bantu ones, use similar songs in ancestral rites.

## 4. Ritual songs in Native American traditions

Among the Navajo (*Diné bizaad*) in the south-west USA, ceremonial songs such as those of the Blessingway or Night Chant are sung during shamanic rites to invoke spirits and natural forces. These songs, with metrical structures and repetitions (e.g. rhythmic quatrains), last hours or days, accompanied by rattles and sand painting, for healing or protection. Parallel to *Carmina*: both are performative, with emphasis on oral rhythm to invoke deities/spirits, and integrate dance. In pre-Columbian Incas (Andean polytheism), songs for Pachamama (Mother Earth) were sung during offerings of *chicha* (corn beer), with fertility themes similar to the Arval *Carmina*.

These cultures, though distant, converge on key elements that go beyond simple poetic recitation, aiming at a rhythmic vocal and often melodic performance:

- **Sung or intoned nature**: almost all examples imply a “song”, not necessarily complex like an operatic aria, but a rhythmic intonation with tonal variations for emphasis. For example, *norito* are intoned or sung with a solemn rhythmic flow, often in

shamanic contexts (*kagura*), to purify and invoke the *Kami* (divine spirits), with a tone that rises and falls to create a hypnotic effect. Similarly, Vedic hymns (*sukta* of the *Rigveda*) are sung with specific melodies (*Sāmaveda*), using modal scales and precise intonations to propitiate deities like Indra, with musical analogies to ancient hymns such as the Ugaritic ones, suggesting a shared "global musical culture" that could connect to Roman *Carmina*. In tribal examples, such as Navajo or Yoruba songs, the chant is shamanic, with monotone or rising tones to alter consciousness and connect with natural spirits. This suggests that *Carmina* were not only declaimed but intoned with a singable rhythm, as indicated for the *Carmina Saliaria*, which were sung during ritual dances.

- **Repetitions and litanic rhythm**: a universal trait is the use of repetitions for mnemonic and magical emphasis. In *norito*, phrases like "ひふみ (*hi-fu-mi*)" are repeated for purification; in Vedic, stanzas are reiterated to invoke cosmic order; in Tibetan Bon, songs with echo for spirit pacification. This reinforces the idea that repetitions like our "*triumpe triumpe triumpe*" were choral cries, scanned with increasing emphasis, similar to a shamanic *mantra*.
- **Musical and gestural accompaniment**: often integrated with instruments and movements. In *norito*, drums or flutes accompany codified gestures; among African Yoruba and American Navajo, drums with dances; for Romans flutes or lyres were common in rites, influenced by Etruscans, with dances like the Salii *tripudium*. This suggests that the song was not isolated, but multisensory, to "contact the Gods".
- **Collective and shamanic performance**: many are performed by priests or choirs, with a leader who guides and a group that responds. In *norito*, a *kannushi* intones with collective responses; in Vedic, *hotṛ* with assistants; in Navajo, shamans with prolonged songs. This evokes the Roman colleges (Salii, Arvales) who sang in processions, with a "shamanic" aspect to alter the state of consciousness and propitiate spirits and deities.

- **Tone and melody**: often monotone or modal, with simple scales (e.g. pentatonic in Vedic or Etruscans), for sacrality and oral ease. Not "songs" but intonations that grow in intensity.

These models provide us with a practical guide to "sing" a reconstructed Roman *Carmen*, adapting it to our context. We have no original melodies, but modern reconstructions suggest a simple and ritual approach. Here is a proposal based on the analogies:

- **Vocal style**: monotone or slightly modulated, similar to *norito* or Vedic, starting low for individual invocations (e.g. "*Enos Tinia iuvato*"), rising for pairs (e.g. "*Tinia pater et Uni*"), culminating with "*triumpe*" as a choral cry, repeated three times for magical emphasis, which could be accompanied by hand claps or stomping on the ground (as in African and American dances, similar to those of the Salii). Use pauses after each caesura ("|") for rhythm, as in Vedic *sukta*.
- **Accompaniment**: add a double flute (Etruscan *aulos*) and percussion (drums, rattles) otherwise, as before, accompanying with hand claps or on the chest, or stomping feet on the ground. Not that one thing must exclude the other.
- **Collective execution**: as in Salii or *norito*, a priest leads, a choir responds to the divine pairs; in our proposed *Carmen* the officiant could recite the first 4 stanzas, the choir respond with stanzas 5 to 8 (those of the groups), the officiant resume alone stanza 9, with evocative tone "*Omnes simul laudate, | divos sakros invocate*" and finally all together conclude with the *tripudium*. It would be equally valid for the priest to recite the first *cola* of each verse and the choir the second. The important thing is coherence with the described elements.

In summary, these examples suggest that the *Carmen* should be "sung" as a ritual intoned hymn, rhythmic and multisensory, recalling an archaic and universal sacrality here expressed by the Etruscan-Roman tradition. The choice of context where to perform the *Carmen* depends on the ritual purpose one wants to evoke: as an act of devotion, individual or group, before an altar, in a wood or sacred place; during a procession, just as the Salii did, who marched through the city intoning their songs (repeating, possibly, each verse three times, as in the *Carmen Arvale*); in the middle of a rite, as invocation and verbal offering to the main deity, before the *datio*. In the case of the *Carmen* proposed above, dedicated to the Capitoline Triad, the ideal would be during the *Epulum Iovis* on the Ides of September, but if the same pattern is followed one can dedicate *Carmina* to each deity, thus having the right song for every occasion.

Below I propose a short generic hymn, of just three verses of 11 syllables (plus the *triumpe* as *sigillum*), which can be used for every deity and context, taking care to change the person if feminine.

Enos [Nomen dei] iuvato, | summe sakre potens

Neve luem permitte, | pater enos protege

Te simul laudamus, | deum sakrum vocamus (or "*numen sakrum invoco*" as individual form)

Triumpe, triumpe, triumpe

Help us, O [deity], | supreme, sacred, powerful

Do not allow ruin, | O father, protect us

Together we praise you, | we call the sacred God

Triumph, triumph, triumph

As for the basic prayers, those recited during invocations and offerings, no ancient source tells us how they should be performed, except by respecting the precision of pronunciation; however, their structure (alliterations, repetitions, and parallelisms) plus the fact that instrumental accompaniment was often present, does not make them too different from the *Carmina* we have just explored in depth, and all this suggests that even the "normal" prayers were, if not properly sung, at least recited following a rhythm. This connects to a universal tradition where prayer is always sung or rhythmized: from the chants of tribal peoples, to the Vedic and Chinese hymns, passing through the Japanese *norito* and reaching the Christian and Muslim melismas, a prayer, any prayer, is never performed as if one were reading a textbook. I doubt that Rome was an exception. Therefore, although we do not have confirmations from ancient sources, but basing myself on the very structure of the formulas, I suggest extending the discussion of the *Carmina* also to the basic prayers.

It doesn't matter what style one decides to adopt, the element that unites this universal tradition is rhythm and vibration, transforming the body into a resonance chamber. From the point of view of the anthropology of religions, sound precedes words, and the rhythmic voice produces measurable physiological effects: it synchronizes breathing, modifies the state of consciousness, facilitates the memorization of formulas. Vibrations cause real effects on the mind, on the body, and on the group, and I am convinced that it is precisely sound the key to understanding the essence of a universal spirituality rooted in human memory, a common language that dates back to before words.

# The Calendar and Organization of Time

The calendar we use today in the West (Julian and Gregorian) is roughly the same as that of ancient Rome, from which it draws direct origin. It is a solar calendar, that is, based on the seasons and the motion of the Sun, whose institution dates back to Julius Caesar; but originally it was very different: in archaic Rome a purely lunar-ritual calendar of only ten months was in use, traditionally attributed to Romulus but probably of Etruscan or even pre-Etruscan origin. Ovid (*Fasti* I, 27-44) explains that the number of months reflected the time of maternal gestation; the months were calculated according to the lunar phases:

- **Kalends** → New Moon (first crescent), beginning of the month
- **Nones** → First quarter, first "week"
- **Ides** → Full Moon, middle and culmination of the month

The year began with March and ended in December; between these two months there was a suspended time dedicated to rites of purification. Romulus's successor, Numa Pompilius, among his numerous reforms also involved the calendar, adding two more months, January and February. At least in form it was already similar to the one we know today, but an intercalary month was integrated to align with the solar year, finding a balance between Moon and Sun. The reasons for the change were both practical and religious: Roman festivals were linked to precise moments of the agricultural cycle, and many were fixed on specific days of the month; without correction the festivals would slide into the wrong seasons, so it was necessary to harmonise the lunar months with the seasons. This was the system that remained in force for about 700 years of Roman history. As long as order was guaranteed. Things changed radically in the turbulent decades of the Late Republic: civil wars, corruption and power vacuum transformed Roman society and culture forever. Religion too was heavily

affected; for about 80 years no *Pontifex Maximus* was elected, leaving the most sacred of institutions vacant. Caesar put an end to the chaos, at least apparently, imposing his new personal order. This also led to a new calendar reform, which had practical motivations (the almost secular lack of religious guidance threw the classical calendar into disarray, which required annual calculations) but above all political ones: to exclude the pontiffs from control of time and therefore from socio-religious life (Caesar, the *Divus*, had to be the only sacred authority), centralisation of power and the cult of the person (the month of *Quintilius* was renamed *Iulius* in his honour).

In short, the reform did not occur exactly with the purest intentions. The new calendar was entirely solar, New Year's Day was definitively moved from March to January. And it is, except for variations and secular shifts, the same one we still use today.

Having finished this brief summary of the evolution of the calendar, let us now turn to how it should be involved in the reconstructed Roman Cult, and in what form. I say at once that continuing to follow the current calendar is absolutely consistent with what was done in imperial Rome, but since this manual aims to rediscover the deepest roots of Etruscan-Roman spirituality, it makes little sense to recover the *Religio* when it had already entered crisis and begun its syncretistic metamorphosis, which proved fertile ground for the rise of Christianity. Therefore I suggest adopting a liturgical calendar prior to the Julian reform. Precisely the luni-solar system, with lunar months and tropical year.

**How to calculate the months**: we have already seen that this is the simplest part, and it begins by identifying the three main days linked to the lunar phases, namely the Kalends, Nones and Ides.

**Kalends**: beginning of the month, day sacred to Juno (Ovid *Fasti* I, 55), coinciding with the **New Moon**. It is important to observe the **exact day** on which the lunation occurs (the ancients observed by eye, starting to watch the sky after sunset, but we have more accurate technologies, such as UTC time): regardless of the time at which the lunar phase begins, the festival will be announced for the **following day**. It is Varro (*De Lingua Latina* VI, 2) who explains to us how the luni-solar calendar of his time worked, confirming the presence of a day between the two months in which the lunation is observed. So the month began from the midnight following the observation, because public rites are always performed in the morning (except for special ceremonies and, precisely, nocturnal rites), considering that for the Romans the day begins at midnight. Macrobius (*Saturnalia* I, 3.6) clarifies that daytime rites are performed from the *hora sexta noctis*, that is from midnight to noon, because this period would be of good omen. Ritual time is that which rises toward the day, not that which declines.

**Nones**: about 5-7 days after the Kalends (9 days before the Ides, the number conceals its etymology), they are not sacred to anyone, unless the day is assigned to some deity. They coincide with the **first quarter** of the Moon.

**Ides**: about 15 days after the Kalends, they are sacred to Jupiter, coincide with the **Full Moon** and mark the middle of the month.

Nones and Ides are calculated exactly like the Kalends, verifying the day on which the astronomical event occurs and fixing the celebration from the following midnight. When the Ancients understood that the Moon is indeed capricious, but follows an average cycle of 29 days + a few variable hours (long months and short months), they began to standardise the calculation: after announcing the Kalends they also declared the Ides, about 15 days after the Kalends (they had understood that the Full Moon always occurs 13/15 days after the New Moon) and they fixed the Nones by counting about 9 days before the Ides (the Romans counted the days of the month backwards, as if it were a constant wait for the next event)

depending on the length of the month: if the Ides were on the 13th the Nones would be on the 5th, if the Ides were on the 15th the Nones on the 7th. Over the centuries the pontiffs stopped looking at the sky, adopting this system which over time proved chaotic and imprecise; paradoxically the standardisation, which was supposed to bring order and convenience, led to the crisis of the luni-solar calendar, a situation further aggravated by the political instrumentalisation of the intercalary month, which no longer served to realign with the solar year but to lengthen or shorten the public offices of friends or enemies. The detachment from **astronomical reality** was a grave error, both on the religious and organisational level; on the contrary, a "pure" lunar calendar (based on direct observation of the Moon) corrects itself every month: if the lunation has not yet appeared, the month does not begin. It is also for this reason that I consider Numa Pompilius not a phase of Roman religious history, but the **point to which we must return**: Numa's reforms, starting with the calendar, were already perfect as they were. In any case, the technologies we have today make the calculation of lunar phases not only convenient but also precise, allowing us to learn all the lunations of the year in advance.

The day following Kalends, Nones and Ides is declared black; **no religious, civil or military initiative is permitted** (Ovid *Fasti* I, 57; Varro *L.L.* VI 4; Macrobius *Sat.* I, 15.22).

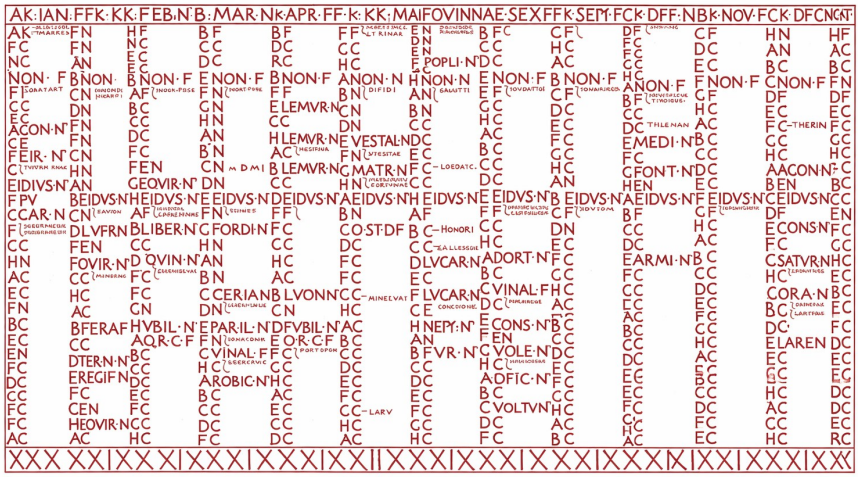
Ritual rule: **the rite must not precede the lunation**. There cannot exist a rite that anticipates the astronomical/divine event. The celebration always takes place the day after the lunation, because ritual time coincides with the beginning of the *dies civilis* (from midnight): **first the sign occurs, then one acts**.

**Calculation of pre-Ides festivals**: we have said that the Ides coincide with the culmination of the month; this first part is marked by the lunar phases. Thanks to literary sources (Varro, Ovid, Macrobius) and archaeological ones (*Fasti Antiates*, *Fasti Praenestini*) we are able to reconstruct a complete Roman calendar. The festivals are assigned by calculating their distance, backwards, from Nones and Ides: our reference point will be the *Fasti Antiates*, the only surviving example of a pre-Julian calendar, even if it was already a standardised calendar no longer based on direct observation of lunations; here we can see that, for example, the *Agonalia Iani* are 5 days before the Ides of January (the count also includes the starting day, as Roman practice), so we will place the festival of Janus five days before the lunar Ides we have calculated. It will not always be possible to faithfully reproduce the arrangement of the festivals, since direct observation of lunations makes every month different, so we should use a flexible hybrid approach:

> Give **priority** to Kalends, Nones and Ides based on the real lunar phase (from the midnight following the event); regressive placement for **fixed festivals**, counting backwards from Nones/Ides (as we did with the *Agonalia*); flexibility for **movable festivals**, for example the *Compitalia* (celebrated in early January) were *feriae conceptivae*, so they can be moved to more convenient days; if a festival **does not fit**, treat it as *conceptiva* or incorporate it into other festivals, especially if minor or if they have similar themes.

This approach makes the calendar **alive and practical**, avoiding rigidity that would cause incongruities, and is consistent with the Numan system based on direct observation and flexible adaptation to circumstances (*Sat.* I, 15.9).

**Calculation of post-Ides festivals**: in the pre-Julian calendar these were often *feriae conceptivae* (decided by the pontiffs on the spot, according to seasons and social/agricultural needs). The second part of the lunar month lasts less than the solar month, so it becomes complex to calculate the festivals precisely, especially if one uses a standardised calendar as reference. In our reconstruction we will treat them all as **movable festivals**, assigning them to convenient days (preferably weekends and public holidays) to facilitate community meetings, or aligning them with natural events (solstices and equinoxes), without necessarily having to follow the order as they appear on the reference calendars. This simulates **historical flexibility**.



(Above: reconstruction of the *Fasti Antiates Maiores*; 1st century BCE.)

**Balance between lunar month and solar year**: lunar months accumulate a shift with the solar year of about 11 days per year, causing the months to slip relative to the seasons. In the pre-Julian calendar the pontiffs inserted an intercalary month (*Mercedonius*) every 2–3 years after February to realign with equinoxes and solstices. We are not obliged to insert it every 2–3 years, but, being able to verify dates and phases with greater precision, we can decide on the spot to insert a *Mercedonius* (always after February) to rebalance with the seasons. The intercalary month is a full month that begins with the New Moon following February; it is calculated exactly like a normal lunar month. It has no festivals except the Kalends (Juno) and Ides (Jupiter), but in the Romulean era this suspended period was characterised by purification rites, which were later transferred to February after Numa's reform. It would however be consistent with Roman practice to perform similar rites also during the intercalary month, treating *Mercedonius* as a "February bis".

**The Roman New Year**: the reason that led us to adopt a luni-solar system is to use it as a **liturgical calendar**, in tune with that primigenial spirituality that precedes the great religious and social changes of the imperial age. Even after the Julian reform March remained the sacred New Year, the beginning of the agricultural and warrior cycle. Therefore we will celebrate the New Year in March, exactly as the Ancients did. It was not a New Year as we understand it today; it was not a single day but the entire month constituted **one long New Year** marked by festivals, inaugurations and rites of passage, which makes it much more similar to the Chinese New Year, with the climax at the Ides, the festival of Anna Perenna, personification of the year that renews itself.

# Basic rules for classical or restituta pronunciation

This is not the place for a grammar lesson, but it is right to clarify some points if we wish to adopt a pronunciation consistent with the period and the language in which the formulas we have used to reconstruct the rites were written. Modern Latin, which we more or less all know, is the ecclesiastical or vulgar one (canonical in the Catholic Church), which originated between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, that is, in an age when the Roman Cult had already ceased to exist or was close to its end. The language spoken by Caesar and Cicero was very different, and the way certain words were pronounced might make listening to a phrase sound strange or even incomprehensible. But that is how they spoke. Classical Latin is reconstructed and restored; it is theoretical but founded on solid evidence, starting from the fact that some letters, engraved on reliefs from archaic periods, were written exactly as they were pronounced. In various Greek letters and inscriptions Caesar is transliterated **Καίσαρ** (*Kaisar*), confirming the pronunciation of the time. Below are the most important aspects to keep in mind:

1. **C** is always hard; in every case it is pronounced **K** (as in “cat”).
2. **G** is always hard; in every case it is pronounced **GH** (as in “go”; the H serves to separate the syllables).
3. **AE** and **OE**, the diphthongs are read distinctly, unlike the ecclesiastical version where the first vowel is mute; in both cases the E is pronounced I: **AI** (as in “my”) and **OI** (as in “boy”).
4. **T** is always read unchanged, crisp, like the T in “table”; only in the late period, and from there into vulgar Latin, did T begin to be pronounced **TS** (similar to Z) when it precedes a palatal vowel. This means that in classical and archaic Latin IMMOLATIO was not pronounced IMMOLAZIO as in modern Latin, but exactly as written. This was common with Etruscan, where T was always dental: *Nortia*, the Etruscan goddess of fortune, was not pronounced *NorZia* but *NorTia*, with the crisp t.

Examples**:** Caesar → **KAISAR**; Coelum → **KOILUM**

Genius loci → **GHENIUS LOKI**; Magnus → **MAGHNUS**

Sacrificium → **SAKRIFIKIUM**; Nostrae → **NOSTRAI**

Accipe → **AK-KI-PE**; Illicet → **ILLIKET**

Gratia → **GRATIA**; Natio → **NATIO**; Ratio → **RATIO**

**Why pronunciation is important**: the traditions we have explored share with Rome the precision of words; even a badly pronounced accent can invalidate the rite. In Vedic India the hymns must be pronounced with **precise intonation** (*udātta*, *anudātta* and *svarita*); a single error is considered disastrous and can attract **ruin** instead of blessing. In pharaonic Egypt, during temple and funerary rites, the hieratic formulas had to be recited **correctly** because the Egyptians believed in the **performative power of the word** (*Heka*), and if pronounced badly it lost its magical force. In Taoist functions the priests (*daoshi*) recite formulas written in archaic characters, often incomprehensible, but where **correct intonation and fidelity to the formula** are considered decisive for the efficacy of the ritual. And finally in Shinto, where the *norito* (liturgical texts or spells addressed to the *Kami*) have sacred value not for their literal meaning but for the **phonetic and traditional force of the words**; it is believed that a single wrong syllable is enough to interrupt communication with the deities. So why is pronunciation important? The word is not a simple sound but has magical power. In the archaic age, when documents did not yet exist, oaths were made by voice under the aegis of Jupiter and *Dius Fidius*; the word itself was so powerful that it was worth as much as a contract, and it is through the word – more than through offerings – that the pact between men and deities is stipulated. Roman liturgy follows the same rules as the traditions we have seen, and an **error** of word or pronunciation (*vitium*) **can compromise the rite**. This is what the *piaculum* is for, but sometimes asking for forgiveness may not be enough.

- **Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* XXVIII, 10-11**
  Highlights that **precision** in formulas is essential for their **efficacy** and that no word must be omitted or pronounced **inappropriately**.
- **Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* (on the reign of Numa) I.9**
  Explains that Numa instituted the pontiffs to **prescribe** and **supervise immutable rites and formulas**.
- **Plutarch, *Life of Numa* 9–12**
  Again describes the task of the pontiff: to direct public rites, to **care for the orthodoxy** of private ones and to **prevent any deviation** from established usage.
- **Cato, *De Agri Cultura* 141**

  The **rigid structure** of the formulas suggests that ritual precision was essential. Every error required **expiation** through a *piaculum*.

These pronunciation rules can help recite the ritual formulas in the most "orthodox" way possible, reading slowly and scanning every letter. But if there is one thing I want to allow myself to advise: **better not to do it at all than to do it badly**. The rite is not a joke, religion is not a hobby, the Gods are not our playmates. Always act with responsibility and respect.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Main classical works

**Cato**, *De Agri Cultura*; for ritual formulas, mainly of agricultural and domestic character.

**Cicero**, *De Divinatione* and *De Natura Deorum*; notions on Etruscan discipline (although fiercely critical of the augural art). It is Cicero who underlines the importance of silence and confirms the rule that the rite opens with Janus and closes with Vesta.

**Ovid**, *Fasti*; for festivals, calendar, celebrations of the year (incomplete work; only the first six months have come down to us). From him I discovered the practice of marking sacred areas with cloths and the use of apotropaic sounds in a ceremonial context.

**Virgil**, *Aeneid*; on *piacula*, on offerings and the confirmation of consecrating trees with fabrics and *ex voto*.

**Pliny**, *Naturalis Historia*; on ritual precision, on the importance of salt in offerings, on respect and devotion toward nature.

**Livy**, *Ab Urbe Condita*; facts and events linked to the history of the city and its protagonists; he is the one who describes the augural rite performed by Numa before accepting the crown.

**Macrobius**, *Saturnalia*; various notions, useful for covering the part of the year left in suspense by Ovid. Macrobius reveals to us that the rule of *capite velato* does not apply to Saturn and chthonic deities.

**Varro**, *De Lingua Latina*; through language and the origin of words he provides us with a precious quantity of information on rites and festivals.

**Plutarch**, *Quaestiones Romanae*; manual of anthropological aetiology on Roman customs.

## Modern authors

**Marco Baistrocchi**, *Riti e Tradizioni di Roma Antica*; particularly relevant is the chapter on the foundation rite; it was useful for determining the sense of the path for tracing the *sulcus*.

The contribution of Artificial Intelligences was useful for intercultural comparisons and for the correction of Latin formulas, always in respect of the ritual sources. Every content of this manual is founded on literary and archaeological evidence directly verified. The AIs provided additional perspectives, recognising the occasional imprecision of the proposed sources due to variations in translations or publications, but the base remains firmly anchored to the documented tradition.